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THE SYRIAN CHURCH.
IN
MALABAR.

A Short History.

REV. J. J. SAUNDERS

To show how it was its Origin

By

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THE S I S

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T O

KENNETH J. SAUNDERS

To Whom This Owes Its Origin

With

Reverence and Love.

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PREFACE.

This paper has not been written with a view to prove anything. An attempt has been made therein to put together all the available material, which is reliable, to make a connected history of the Syrian Church in Malabar which claims as its Founder no less a person than the Apostle Thomas.

The difficulty of writing a thesis of this nature miles away from the locality need not be pointed out. The writer wishes very much he had some more, authentic information, especially regarding the present-day conditions, the creeds and rites of this church, a subject to which he knows he has not done full justice. But lack of access to any original material has forced him to be content with what little he could glean from the few reliable writers on the subject. As he himself is a member of the Anglican Syrian Church, it is hoped that a close acquaintance with the Jacobite Syrian worship will not be expected of him!

The writer's thanks are due to the authors of the several books which have been freely made use of, especially to Rev. Ittyerah Eappen of Travencore whose Prize Essay on The Malabar Syrian Church and Community, in Vernacular, has been of immense help in making a connected history of the Church in the first part of the sixteenth century; to that modest friend in the Syrian Seminary at Kottayam, who made some translations for the writer from the Syriac; and last, but not least, to Dr. Kenneth Saunders, who, by his inspiring

sympathy, stimulating suggestions, and constructive though often provocative, criticisms, has taught him to think and work intelligently and constructively.

Berkeley, California.

24th March 1930.

Thomas John.

Chapter 1.

I N T R O D U C T I O N .

One of the outstanding complaints of India against Christian Missions, is that it is a ruse resorted to by the Western nations to flood the Orient with the White Race.

It seems there are two main reasons for this complaint. The fact that political and economic exploiters invariably follow the Missionary, seems to suggest, at least to those who are suspiciously inclined, that Christianity is only a tool in the hands of these nations, which are far from leading any Christian life at home. Hindu students also who experience series of shocks from the unchristian treatments accorded them in these Christian lands, are driven to the conclusion that Missionary Enterprise is nothing but a clever and self-consolatory excuse to exploit other nations. And when it is found that some of the so-called Missionaries from the prosperous America are out there only to make a living, the intelligent Hindu holds that in America there is no such thing as 'failure'; ~~therefore~~ a man is either a 'Success' or a foreign Missionary!

The Indian's complaint also gains support from the undesirable discrimination often betrayed by the Missionary Boards, between equally qualified native christians and their White friends. Though some of the progressive Boards realising the situation have decided to give equal chance to qualified natives, sufficient

encouragement does not seem to have been given to any native aspirant ~~as~~ yet. This, of course, may be due to the scarcity of well-qualified and willing native volunteers. Anyhow it is gratifying to note that there is the tendency to attract and encourage more and more native christians to take up the leadership of their churches.

There is a loud cry in India also against what they call 'Western' Christianity. India certainly does not want to be burdened with the heritage of the Western theological and ecclesiastical controversies. The Missionary is undoubtedly mistaken when he tries to implant the Occidental form of Christianity in the Orient. If you want to share the Light-giving Flame with your brother, you cannot do it from your electric bulb, however useful it may be for your purposes; you have to go back to the original Candle or Torch that you modified into your Incandescent Lamp.

This original Torch was lit in the Indian soil also in the early days of Christianity, and it has been handed down from generation to generation, though not without modifications. It seems reasonable to suppose that this ancient Church, with her long experience in the country, having gone through all the dangers and troubles which any new organisation has to go through, is well-adapted to the people and conditions of that country.

Hence, the Syrian Church may be destined to play a by no means unimportant part in the great task of christianising India and moulding an Indian Church. And if the Missionary Enterprise is one day bound to fall into native hands, who better equipped to take up the task than members of this ancient church, with their centuries of christian culture and background?

Considering the part the Syrians may be called upon to play in evolving for India a suitable Church, and the possibilities of the members of that community helping carry the Missionary's burden, it would not be amiss for those concerned with the Church's greatest enterprise to inquire into the history and conditions of the Syrian Church, and find out how and why that church and that community of christians were welcomed and respected by the heathens until their 'Christian' brethren from across the sea arrived in their midst to 'christianise' them.

This Syrian Church in Malabar is an institution which has, at all times, attracted the attention of the historian, roused the curiosity of the traveller, and elicited the wonder and admiration of the antiquarian. Sixteenth-century-Europe was startled to hear that in an obscure corner of heathen India there existed a Christian Church claiming its origin from the Apostle Thomas, and jealously upholding her traditional faith. It is not surprising, therefore, that soon several eminent

writers and scholars turned their attention to the history of this interesting Church. Quite a mass of literature on the subject has come into existence.

But, either because they had no access to reliable authorities and trust-worthy documents, or because they did not fully grasp the real meaning and significance of certain events, or because they had not sufficient opportunities of making local investigations and of becoming acquainted with the people and the Church they were writing about, it has to be regretted that many of them have failed to do full justice to the subject. It has therefore been the standing complaint of the Syrian Christians that Western scholars invariably have failed to bring to the study and exposition of the subject the necessary detachment from sectarian and patriotic bias and displayed a want of sympathetic understanding and dispassionateness.

As a result of this grievance, a new book 'The Indian Church of St. Thomas' has been published recently (1929), in vernacular, by a member of the old South Syrian family. He held the office of Secretary to the Most Reverend Mar Joseph Dionysius, Metropolitan of Malabar; and this position gave him many facilities for studying the literature relating to the origin, vicissitudes, tenets and foreign relations of the Church. This author offers some new evidences which are sure to raise up controversy, and which, if found adequate, may shake the almost established Apostolate of St. Thomas in N. India.

The present writer, however, has no desire to tread ~~over~~ the smouldering embers of living controversies. Nor is he qualified to do so at present. The controversial points, it may be said, ~~are~~ are mainly two. About the origin of the Syrian Church, there seems to be a growing consensus of opinion among scholars that the traditional story may be right, though sceptics are not wanting still. But about the other point, the nature of the Church before the arrival of the Portuguese, opinions are still divergent. European scholars hold that the Church was Nestorian; Roman Catholics try to prove it was Catholic; while, the Syrians would like to believe it was first Nestorian and then Jacobite. To suspend judgement until better evidences turn up seems to be the safer policy, in the circumstances.

In the next few chapters we proceed to examine the available material regarding the origin, and then to trace the history of the Church to modern times. What little could be gathered about the present day life of the Church has been appended in the last chapter.

Chapter.2.

THE TORCH THAT THOMAS LIT?

Historians generally admit that, from very early times, there existed a community of christians on the remote shores of Southern India. Eusebius, the Father of Church History, speaks of christians in India in 190 A.D. Speaking about Pantaenus, he says "he displayed such zeal for the divine Word, that he was appointed as a herald of the Gospel of Christ to the nations in the East, and was sent as far as India.... It is reported that among persons there who knew of Christ, he found the Gospel according to Matthew, which had anticipated his own arrival. For Bartholomew, one of the Apostles, had preached to them, and left with them the writing of Matthew in the Hebrew language, which they had preserved till that time".¹

Jerome says ² "Pantaenus, a philosopher of the stoic school, was on account of his great reputation for learning sent by Demetrius, Bishop of Alexandria, to India, to preach Christ to the Brammans and philosophers there."

At the Council of Nicea, among the bishops present, there was one John, the Persian, who presided over the "Churches of the whole of Persia and Great India".³

1. Eusebius. Ecclesiastical History. Bk. 5. Ch. 10.

2. Letter 'To Magnus an orator of Rome'

Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers. Vol. 6. pp. 150.

3. The Apostle Thomas in S. India. Farquhar. pp. 24.

Bulletin of John Rylands Library. Vol. 2. No. 1.

The most definite historical evidence we have is the witness of Cosmos Indicopleustes, who visited India in 522 A.D. He has referred distinctly to a christian community in Male (Malabar) "where the pepper grows".¹

It used to be argued that the India mentioned by Eusebius, Jerome and bishop John at Nicea, was not the India proper. But this doubt has been cleared up recently. The fact that Jerome mentions India's exclusive product, the Brahman, indicates that the country that Pantaenus visited was India, and not Parthia or Afghanistan. The words 'great India' from the lips of the Persian bishop John, also points to the whole vast country beyond the river Indus, on the East, because a large piece of territory on the west of the river, was, in those days, frequently called India, too. Thus far we can show only that christians existed in India from 190 A.D. onwards, and in South India from 522 A.D.

The question of their origin, however, has occasioned wide differences of opinion. Some authors have asserted that the christian community was planted in South India towards the later half of the fourth century by a Syrian merchant, Thomas of Cana; others hold that christianity was first preached in these parts in the fifth century by Nestorian missionaries; from Persia; while a third class of writers account for their origin by attributing it to the evangelistic efforts of the Apostle Thomas.

1. Sir Henry Yule's Edition of "Cathay and the Way Thither"

Vol. I. Introduction. CLXXI.

First let us see what the early writers thought about the origin of these christians.

We have already seen how Pantaenus saw a Gospel according to Matthew in Hebrew with them and how he was told that they were converted by Bartholomew.

Bishop Dorotheas (254 A.D.) has written that St. Thomas was martyred in 'Kalamina, an Indian town'¹.

Bishop Hippolitus (220 A.D.) also refers to Kalamina as an Indian town, the death-place of St. Thomas².

Mar Ephraem, who died in 373 A.D., has referred in his hymns, to the remains of the Apostle Thomas removed to Eddessa, as an 'invaluable treasure'. He has also referred to the dark sunburnt colour of the Apostle, which points to his South Indian Apostolate.³

Between 570 and 580 A.D., Theodore, an Indian Christian, after visiting the scene of the martyrdom of Thomas, spoke⁴ to Bishop Gregory of Tours about the removal of the Apostolic remains to Edessa, and said it was raining heavily on the day. This also seems to indicate South India, as the date fixed by all for the event coincides with the dates of the south west monsoon⁵.

1. Cave's *Historia Literaria*. pp 107, 108, quoted by Phillip in *The Indian Church of St. Thomas*. pp 38.

2. *De Duo decimum Apostolis*, Ed. Fabr. Appendix p 30. quoted by *ibid*, pp 38.

3. *Indian Church of St. Thomas*. Phillip. pp 39.

4. *Apostle Thomas in South India*. Farquhar. pp 22.

5. *Indian Church of St. Thomas* Phillip. pp 39.

Another early record we have is the 'Acts of Judas Thomas', an Edessene story, the date of which lies somewhere around 200 A.D.¹A brief summary of this story, the original of which was in Syriac², may be given here.

King Gondophares wanted a skilled architect to build a palace. He therefore sent his messenger Habbān to Jerusalem, where Jesus appeared to him and sold him St. Thomas the Apostle. Thomas sailed with Habbān and on their way reached a town called Sandrak, where they took part in the marriage festivities of the king's daughter. From there they proceeded to the court of king Gondophares and reported themselves. When the king acquainted him with the project, Thomas said he would build the palace within six months, though it was the rainy season. But all the money that was given him for the purpose, he spent among the poor. At this Gondophares grew angry and cast him into prison. Meanwhile the king's brother Gad died and went to heaven where he found a magnificent palace that Thomas had built for the king. With a desire to buy it from him, Gad returned to the king who was extremely glad to hear about it. Thomas was then set free and the king himself later became christian. From here Thomas went to another kingdom where he preached and made many converts, but was finally put to death by order of the king.

1. The Apostle Thomas in India. pp. 25.

2. Early Christianity Outside the Roman Empire. F.C. Burkitt. pp. 75.

Until recently this story was regarded as quite unhistorical. But Epigraphy¹ by means of the recently unearthed Takṭ-i-Bahāi inscription near Peshāwar, and Numismatics by means of numerous coins found in North-West India, have afforded strong evidence of the existence of an Indo-Parthian King Gondophares, to whose court St. Thomas is said to have come, in the Acts. Thus it is believed now that there might be some historical basis for the Edessene story.

Leaving these early references, we now turn to South India where, the people claim St. Thomas preached.

The tradition preserved by the Syrian Church in Malabar is as follows:

In the year 52 A.D. the Apostle Thomas arrived in Muziris, (present Cranganore) by the sea, from the island of Socotra. As a result of his intensive preaching there, he made many converts, organised seven churches, namely, Pālūr, Cranganore, Parūr, Gōkkamangalam, Chāyal, Niranam and Quilon, and also ordained two presbyters. After thus sowing the seed of christianity in Malabar, the Apostle moved eastwards and preached with success, converting the king and a considerable number of people. Then he went to Malacha, China and other countries to spread the Gospel.

1. Imperial Gazetteer of India, Vol. II, p. 2, C. Oxford, 1907.

2. Dr. Medlycott, 'India and the Apostle Thomas', London, 1905.



On his return from China, he was persecuted by Brahmans at a place called Mylâpur, on the east coast, where one of them pierced him with a lance. Thus he won a martyr's crown in the year 72 A.D.¹.

This is the common tradition, though the date of his arrival is sometimes given as 50 or 51 A.D. and sometimes the island of Socotra is not mentioned.

Mr. T. K. Joseph, one of the South Indian antiquarians, has recently brought to light some interesting facts regarding an old legend.

"An anonymous Portuguese MS. (Sloane MS. 274c A, British Museum) by a Missionary, who in or after 1676 A.D., was living at the Carmelite church in Anjîcainal (ie, the modern Ernakulam) says (folio 10 r) that the very Hindus affirmed that there was an image of Our Lady in the Pagoda called Tir Corûnfa, belonging to the king of upper Cranganore. The Rev. Fr. H. Hosten S.J. suggests that the author of the MS. is Fr. Mathew of St. Joseph, who helped Van Rhee de on his *Hortus Malabaricus*, (Amsterdam. 12 Vols, 1676-1693). The Missionary's Tir Corûnfa is Tirrukkurumpa (Sanskrit, Srîee Kurumpa) ie, goddess Kâli of Cranganore in Cochin. We know that some of the early Portuguese went into a Hindu temple and worshipped the goddess there, mistaking her for St. Mary."².

1. Indian Church of St. Thomas. pp. 13. Also Apostle Thomas in S. India, Farquhar, pp. 5.

2. Indian Antiquary September 1929.

A palm-leaf manuscript in Malayalam, about 100 years old, has the following legend connecting St. Thomas and the goddess Kālī of Cranganore, the Srēē Kurumpa.

Translation.

It is said that St. Thomas the Apostle did not come to Malayalam country, that he came only to Nāgapattanam (Nagapatam), and that some who believed after his preaching there came to Malayālam country and propagated The Way (Christianity). Contrary to that I believe for certain that the Apostle himself came (to Malabar), preached and baptized. For I give one evidence. When the Apostle came as far as Cranganore, a Pulaya (low-caste) woman, decked in many gold ornaments, came in front of him with beguiling words, after the manner of women, in order to hinder the Apostle's journey. He got angry and cursed this woman and by his power commanded "sit down Kurumpa". So in consequence of that curse she was turned into a stone image. That image is to this day placed in the Cranganore temple.

If the words which the Malayalis (ie, Nairs) say about this matter are taken into consideration (those words) will turn out to be an evidence. That is, they say, that the Cranganore territory was in olden times a heath, that it lay uninhabited, and that there was a path through it. Before people inhabited it, a Paradēshi (foreigner) came there, and along with him came also Kurumpa, their goddess (They say also) that he went away after setting her up where the temple now stands; and commanding 'this is the house I have built for you'.

After this spectacle the Apostle returned hither.

Thereupon at sunset a Nair, passing that way with an umbrella and seeing a woman sitting there, made advances and went to her. She then requested him to get a house built for her by himself. So he tried to take her to his house, but she did not agree. He therefore went away after giving her the umbrella that was in his hand so that the dew may not affect her. He came the next morning, caused the necessary things to be brought, built a house and gave it to her. He then asked her who she was and where she came from. 'You will soon have occasion to know that' she replied, but did not say definitely who she was or how she had come here.

Still this Nair lusted after her on account of her beauty, and without departing from there, lived with her many days, thinking of consorting with her. This Nair was surprised because all these days she did neither eat nor drink, and he began to make it public. Consequently several people came and crowded every day to see her. While all stood gazing she turned into a stone image. Then one of those assembled began to dance and said 'I started from Ayodhya, and am come to save the people living in the Malayalam country from the troubles falling upon them.' Will you not relieve me?' she asked. Then all together agreed to relieve her as their protectress and made a temple (for her) there. To this day they have been worshipping her.



And this Nair who gave the umbrella finally became the ruler of Cranganore. He is usually called the Nair of Kotakkād (umbrella forest). After the lapse of many years in this manner he died without a successor. Then the Swarūpam (dynasty) of Padiñjāttēdom, sprang from the Swarupam of Ayirur, was given that kingdom. So to this day a man has to go there (to the temple) as the Nair of Kotakkād, with a long-handled umbrella, held over him (by another), when the festival of the pagans is celebrated at the Cranganore temple.

Although the words of these infidels (Hindus) are false, we can lay them all aside and conclude by means of our (not including the readers) reason and the knowledge we have, that as the Nasrānis (Syrian Christians) say, that St. Thomas the Apostle came into the Malayalam country, preached, built churches and wrought many miracles for making The Way known.

Considering this (one can see that) it is by the power of miracles that Christian religion came into being (in Malabar). Therefore it must be believed as certain that just as Our Lord Jesus, the Messiah, propogated the Margam (way) by working many signs and wonders, He gave that Power to his disciples also and they preached in all the world".

(Translation ends).¹.

1. This is Mr. T. K. Joseph's Translation. Refer Indian Antiquary, September 1929.

We do not know who the author of this vernacular MS. is, neither do we dare to say how far the St. Thomas-Kurumpa legend can be taken as evidence for the South Indian Apostolate of St. Thomas.

Of more interest to us is the local evidence from the customs and names of the people who pride themselves on having been converted by the Apostle.

Of the seven churches said to have been founded by the Apostle, six are still extant, while the seventh, Chayal, is in ruins. Of the two families which as tradition testifies, were raised to ecclesiastical dignity by the Apostle, one Sankōōrikal (corrupted form Sankarapurakal) seems still to exist, while the other, Pakalōmattam, ceased to exist only in the last century. Besides these, there are still a few families which claim, as the result of a special favour promised by the Apostle, to have had priests without intermission from the time of the Apostle until the present day. Such priests call themselves the Sixtieth or sixty-sixth or so from the Apostle, according to the order of their succession from him. Joseph Panjikaran, a Roman Catholic author on the subject, says "I came across a very old manuscript history in Malayalam verse on the life and labours of St. Thomas in South India. Therein it was declared that it was the epitome of a very ancient and original work written by Maliekal Thomas, a Syrian Priest, who was the third in succession from St. Thomas, and that the abridgement was made by another Thomas, the father of a

priest of the same family who was the forty-eighth in descent from the Apostle".¹

Chowghat is an important place-name connected with the labours of the Apostle. The original name of this place was Palayōor². The common tradition of Malabar associates the change of name with a miracle³. The common belief is that several Nambūdhiris (high caste Brahmins) embraced christianity, and their temple was consecrated for christian worship. As a result, they threw away most of their idols. Some of these are preserved in remembrance of the event; these and those thrown away could be seen in the tanks all around the locality even today.

A number of Numbudhiris, who refused to change their religion, left that place which ^{was} now considered polluted. One writer says ⁴ that he is "informed that in the Nagara Grantha Variola of the family of the Kalathum Nambudhiri in British Malabar the following is written: 'Kali year 3153, (52 A.D.)⁵ the foreigner Thomas Sanyasi came to our gramom, preached there, causing thereby pollution. We therefore came away from that gramom; (Palayōor). This, I am told was reported by a member of that family. I did not see the original, neither could I procure a copy of it.'"

1. The Syrian Church in Malabar. pp 11.

2. Kerala Ulpathy (Origin of Kerala).

3. See Appendix A.

4. Panjikaran. Syrian Church in Malabar. pp 5.

5. Author's insertion.

Anyhow these Nambudhiris who left, cursed the land, calling it Chāpakkād, the cursed forest. The place has ever since retained the name, though slightly corrupted into Chavakkad, and anglicised into Chowghat.

This tradition concerning the name of Chowghat and the conversion of Nambudhiris, gains confirmation from the following facts. Strict and orthodox Nambudhiris still consider the place as cursed, and for that reason, they would not even use Pansupari¹ when they come there. Drinking water from that locality is abominable to them. Also an appreciable Nambudhiri element in customs and general appearance is a noticeable feature of the Syrian Christians especially of those parts. This is corroborated by Mr. Nagam Iyah, a Brahmin archeologist, who says,² "There is no doubt as to the tradition that St. Thomas came to malabar, and converted a few families of Nambudhiris. For, in consonance with this long-standing traditional belief in the minds of the people of the Apostle's mission and labours among high-caste Hindus, we have it before us today the fact that certain Syrian Christian women, particularly of a Dēsom called Kunnamkulam, wear clothes as Nambudhiri women do, move about screening themselves with huge

1. Betel leaves, cocoanut and slices, for chewing.

2. Travencore State Manual. Vol 2. ppl22-123.

Trivandrum. 1906.

umbrellas from the gaze of profane eyes as those women do, and will not marry, except perhaps in exceptional cases, and that only recently, but from among dignified families of similar aristocratic descent".

And lastly, a number of Christian churches there, exhibit the peculiar architecture of Hindu pagodas. This fact was very puzzling to the Portuguese. Rev. Hough for instance says that Father Vincent de Lagos "was displeased at the sight of the christian churches so closely resembling the heathen pagodas"¹.

This tradition that St. Thomas concerned himself with the conversion of Nambudhiris, finds further support in some of the customs that are still observed by the Syrian Christians in spite of the merciless holocaust of a great number of such customs at the Synod of Diamper. Corresponding to the 'Jatakarmam' of the Nambudhiris, the father of every Syrian Christian child, thirty-six hours after its birth, mixes a little honey, ghee and gold, and puts it into the mouth of the babe; six months later, the father places the infant on his lap and feeds it with rice for the first time. This corresponds to the 'Annaprasanam' ceremony of the Nambudhiris. Again, the barber is an indispensable person in all marriages of both the Syrians and the Nambudhiris. The 'Pulakuli' ceremony is invariably

1. Christianity in India. Vol. 1. pp 246. London, 1839.

celebrated on the tenth and eleventh day after death. This is in strict accordance with the customs of the Nambudhiris for other sects of Hindus celebrate this ceremony on the fifteenth and sixteenth days. Meat of every kind is rigidly forbidden for this feast, and the prohibition is very strictly obeyed, and some conservative families use neither meat nor fish till the year has fully run its course, and a ceremony, corresponding to the 'Andoosradham' of the Nambudhiris, is performed.

It may be also pointed out that in Palur, Kunnankulam and neighbouring places, there are still several christian families, with the same name as those of some Nambudhiri families, in the neighbourhood and at a distance. Anyone who is familiar with the importance the aristocratic Indians attach to their family names, would easily see that this is due to the refusal of both the branches, the christian-converts and the non-converts, to drop their hereditary title. There are also several Christian and Nambudhiri families of the same name at different localities who both claim that their original home was Palur (Palayoor).

From these observations on the resemblances in the customs, similarities in names and other things, let us now turn to some of the authorities who have written on the subject, and see how the question stands at present.

Catholic writers generally admit the Indian Apostolate of St. Thomas. Among others opinions differ.

Among those who uphold the tradition is Asseman, who is convinced that all the religious literature in Greek, Latin, and Syriac, bear bears testimony to the Indian Apostolate of Thomas.¹ Bishop Heber says there is no reason for any doubt on this question as there are plenty of evidences to show that the Apostle preached the Gospel in India and was martyred in South India.² Dr. Buchanan entertained a decided opinion that "we have as good authority for believing that the Apostle Thomas died in India as that the Apostle Peter died at Rome"³. Rev. Whitehouse says that St. Thomas was the Apostle of India, and requests writers not to summarily dismiss the tradition because one or two scholars doubt its truth⁴. Dr. Neale, an expert in 'ecclesiastical archeology' draws evidence from the liturgy of the Syrian Church to prove its origin from St. Thomas⁵. Rev. D'Orsey, after examining all Portuguese writings, is inclined to the view that the tradition which has always prevailed in Malabar denotes a real fact.⁶ And recently Dr. Farquhar has minutely examined the case and concluded that "thirty years ago the

1. Dissert de Syro-Sabbas, 1717. Vol. 4. pp 470, quoted by the author of the Indian Church of St. Thomas. 39.

2. Madras Journal of Literature and Science. Vol 13. pp 212.

3. Christian Researches, Buchanan. pp 188.

4. Lingerings of Light in a Dark Land. pp 26.

5. Syrian Church in Malabar. Panjikaran. pp 8.

6. Portuguese Discoveries, 1498-1500, Vol. 1, pp 111, London 1893. Quoted by Panjikaran in 5.

balance of the probability stood absolutely against the story of the Apostolate of Thomas in India; We suggest that today the balance of probability is distinctly on the side of historicity"¹.

Many scholars have questioned the truth of the tradition and asserted that St. Thomas did not visit India. "Basnage was the first to deny the coming of St. Thomas into India. La Croze, Tillemont and Trigaut followed him in this opinion. Among modern historians Rev. Hough stands pre-eminent, and has made an almost classical attempt to disprove the evidence for the tradition by giving a different location to places said to be in India, and by having recourse to conjectures to explain away difficulties standing in the way of his theory. Milne Rae, Mateer, and Logan have largely drawn from the arguments of Hough without adding much original matter to his masterly exposition".².

In the latest book on the subject, the Syrian³ author argues that there is as much evidence to show that Gondophares of the 'Acts' was a South Indian king as to suggest that he was Indo-Parthian.

He mentions an old farce of the Syrian Christians depicting the acts of the Apostle Thomas. In this, a Cheraman Perumal of the Chola Kingdom takes the place of Gondophares. It is he who sends Habban. It is well-known

1. The Apostle Thomas in South India. p. 103.

2. Syrian Church in Malabar. Panjikaran. pp 7.

3. Indian Church of St. Thomas. E.M. Phillip
Kottayam. 1929.

that Perumals were kings in South India. Moreover, the Edessene story itself points to South India more than any other part of the world as its scene.

In the original Syriac¹ form of this story, the place where St. Thomas and Habban stopped first on their travels, is Sandrôkh Mahōsa (meaning city of Sandrôkh). This word Sandrôkh is the Sanskrit form of the vernacular name of Cranganore. Sandrôkh, in Sanskrit means the 'abode of Chandra or the Moon'. According to Hindu mythology, Chandra is the head-gear of Siva. Siva has also several other names indicating that he is Chandra's abode. Names such as Chandra-chūden, Chandra-sēkharan, all meaning the same thing. Sandrôkha is only another synonym for Siva. Sandrôkh Mahōsa means 'the great city of Siva'. Now, Kodungallūr (English, Cranganore) is a corrupt form of Kōdalingūr. Kōdalinga also means Siva, and ūr means 'place'. Thus the meaning of Kōdalingūr or Cranganore is 'the place or city of Siva' the Sanskrit form of which was Chandrokh Mahosa, later Sandrokh Mahosa. In Greek it became Sandropolisa and in English Anthropolis!⁽²⁾

The name of the king was Gadnapar in Syriac, not Gondophares. The Tamil king of Mylapur was called Kandappa Raja.² So it is suggested that Gadnapahar of the 'Acts' might have been this Tamil king!

1. Early Christianity .Burkitt. pp 2

2. S. India Christian repository for 1837. Vol. 1 pp 263-266.

The name Habban also seems to have been a South Indian name. The Telegu people around Madras were skilled sailors in the ancient times¹; and the name Happān is very common among them.

With these and a few other such arguments the Syrian author tries to show that the Edessene story need not necessarily point to North India or Indo-Parthia as its scene.

However we can only await farther definite historical evidence to make a decision one way or the other, in favour of Gondophares or Kandappa Raja. Meantime, let us examine two objections that several sceptics have made to the tradition.

It is now generally admitted that the Indo-Parthian king Gondophares who ruled over the extensive kingdoms of Afghanistan, Kandahar, Seistan and Northern and Southern Punjab lived before 50 A.D. Professor Percy Gardner says that some of the coins of Gondophares "would seem to have been struck not later than the middle of the first century"², and Mr. Vincent Smith admits that "all indications of his date taken together show that he must have reigned in the first half of the first century"³.

1. The Indian Engineering September 5. 1893.

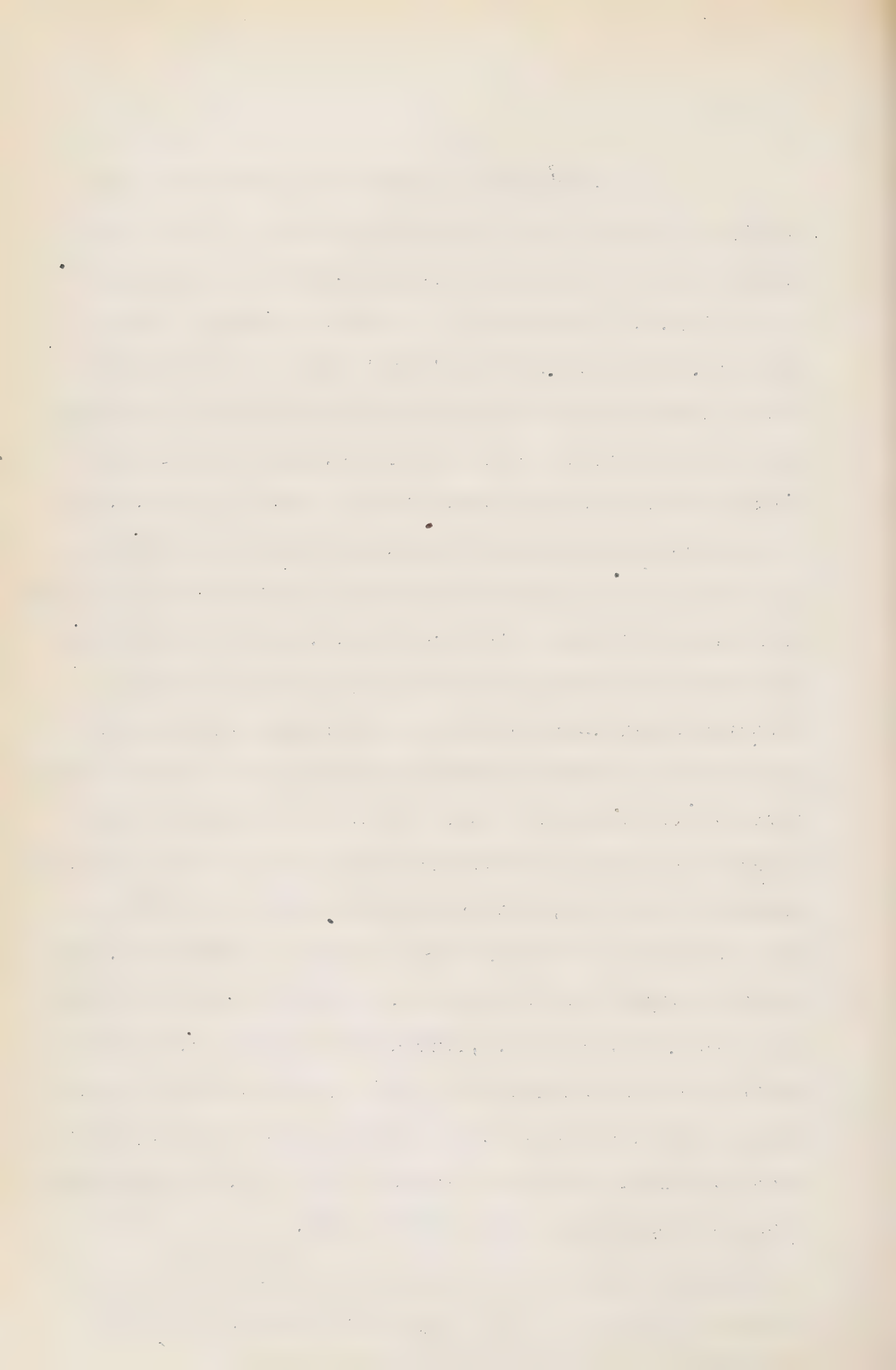
2. Dr. Medlycott, India and the Apostle Thomas. p. 7.

3. Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal.
January. 1903.

Dr. Farquhar has shown that there is some reason to believe that the Apostle Thomas sailed from Alexandria with Habban, and reached Taxila probably about 48 or 49 A.D.¹ From there it is quite probable that he went to South India. In the 'Acts' also it is said that Thomas left the court of Gondophares and went to another kingdom where he met with his death. Why he should go to South India, and how he would arrive there in 52 A.D. and a few such minor details have been carefully worked out by Dr. Farquhar and found reasonable.² The Kushan war which took place at some date near 50 A.D., made it impossible for Thomas to continue his preaching in the Scytho-Parthian Empire. Habban who was a merchant and knew the South Indian trading cities, and perhaps had friends there, advised his friend to move South. As he could not get a direct ship to South India from the mouth of the Indus, because of the war, he took an Alexandrian ship ready to sail to Egypt, as it would call at Socotra for cargo, from where he could sail to Muziris. He started from the Indus mouth in December 51 A.D., stayed three months in Socotra waiting for the Alexandrian ships going to South India which would come only at the Monsoon time in June, and then went to Muziris which he reached in 52 A.D. Thus Farquhar shows the tradition need not be wrong.

1. Apostle Thomas in North India, John Rylands Library Bulletin January 1927.

2. Apostle Thomas in South India, John Rylands Library Bulletin, January 1927



The place of martyrdom of Thomas has been referred to in early writings as Kalamina and historians have been at great pains to identify this name with some town in India. They have left no map unsearched to find out Kalamina, and have made many ingenious conjectures. Even Dr. Medlycott, an authority on St. Thomas, makes an elaborate and very amusing attempt to derive the word from "Kalāh, the name of a place, and Elmina, which in Syriac denotes a port"¹.

The explanation of this difficulty seems to be this. The unanimous tradition of the Syrian Christians has always pointed out the Little Mount (a locality near Madras) as the scene of the Apostle's martyrdom. In Tamil, the language of those parts, the place was called "Chinna malai" which means little mount. Just as the Portuguese in later years translated the name into "Monte Pequeno", so for the same reason, the early Syro-Chaldaean visitors and settlers called it Galmona, from the Syro-Chaldaean word 'Galma', a rocky hill, and 'ona', a diminutive suffix like the English 'ock'. Galmona thus means hillock or little mount. Those who are familiar with the corruption and transformation of names ² in India, can easily imagine how Galmona became Kalamina.

1. India and the Apostle Thomas. pp150-161.

2. See Appendix for interesting examples. Appendix B.

Another point which may be brought out is the mention of St. Bartholomew in connection with the conversion of those christians whom Pantaenus visited in 180 A.D. It is quite clear that the Syrians must have referred to their Apostle as Mar Thoma as they always do, and to the unaccustomed ear of Pantaenus it must have sounded Marthoma or Barthoma and he must have inferred they meant Bartholomew.

In concluding this vague and loosely connected chapter we may be permitted to say that as yet no strong evidence has been brought forward to disprove the Syrian tradition, but that, as we have seen, there are several reasons to regard it as true. To add to these, in the next chapter we shall see that at least by the third century there flourished a christian community in South India. When Cosmos says that in 522 A.D. there existed a well organised Christian church and community in Malabar, it has to be admitted that they must have been there at least a few years earlier.

The tradition and the local evidences to support it, have been put forward; the objections which seemed to be in the way, have been removed. Possible evidences have been given. But no argument is offered as it does not seem to be necessary. It is the hope of the writer that the strange and eventful history of the Church alone would suggest the Spirit of the Apostolic Founder.

Chapter 3.

The Torch Burns.

The traditional belief in South India, about the first converts of the Apostle, it has been already pointed out in the previous chapter, has always been that they were composed mostly of Nambudhiri Brahmins. Dr. Francis Day ¹ ascribes to this fact, the high respect in which these Christians were held; though one is inclined to question it on the observation that it is among the lower classes of people that Christianity seems to spread quickly. However it is commonly agreed that four of the families converted, Kalli, Kaliānka, Sankōōrikal and Pakalōmattam, ~~were~~ wealthy Nambudhiri Brahmins. The two families which the Apostle chose for hereditary ecclesiastical privileges, were the two last named, of which the former still exists. It has been already pointed out how the priests in these families number themselves from the Apostle.

The next important event among these people that we know of, is the coming into their midst of a very wealthy merchant called Thomas of Cana. It need not be said, perhaps, that historians have found here another point to disagree upon. According to the Syrian tradition, the date of this Armenian's arrival was in 345 A.D. while European scholars are divided in their opinion, some

1. Land of the Perumals. Dr. Francis Day. pp. 244, 256.

fixing it in the fifth century, others in the seventh and eighth¹. Dr. Day has written ~~has written~~ that as a result of his researches it would seem that the Cheraman Perumal who ruled at the time of the arrival of This Thomas, ascended the throne in 341 A.D. This agrees with the Syrian tradition and also with the date of the Copper Plate given by this king to Him.²

Thomas of Cana who came to Malabar for trade was surprised to find some Christians there. He took pity on them in their isolation and is said to have gone back to his country to spread the news. There is a tradition that he also took back with him two of the St. Thomas Christians. Anyhow, on his second tour to Malabar, he took with him some Syrian families, priests, and a presbyter called Mar Joseph. These landed at Cranganore and with the permission of the king, settled there³. Cranganore was at this time the capital city of the Perumals.

This merchant Thomas must have had great influence with the king. For we find that the Perumal showed his esteem of Thomas and his Christians, by granting them several high titles and privileges, recorded on the famous Copper Plates of the Syrian Christians.

1. Land of the Perumals. pp216

2. See Appendix C.

3. The Kottayam College Quarterly Magazine Vol.2.No.2.
October 1866. pp74.

Copies of these Copper Plates taken to England by Dr. Buchanan are said to be preserved in the Cambridge University Museum. The Jews, who were also a strong community in Cranganore at this time, received several privileges and the witnesses on the Christian tablets were four wealthy Jews. "The old Portuguese historians relate, that soon after the arrival of their countrymen in India..... The Syrian Bishop of Angamale... deposited in the fort of Cochin, for safe custody, certain tablets of brass, on which were engraved rights of nobility and other privileges granted by a Prince of the former age".¹ Though these were lost for a time, when Lieutenant Colonel Macaulay became British Resident in Travencore, they were recovered through his efforts. Dr. Buchanan said that "it may be doubted, whether there exist in the world many documents of so great length which are of equal antiquity, and in such faultless preservation, as the christian tablets of Malabar"².

Without going into a detailed description of these tablets³, we may content ourselves by noting that the christian community at this time was very powerful and prosperous. They were made masters over seventeen sub-castes. Even today it is not unusual to see some of these

1. Christian Researches. Dr. Buchanan. pp 189.

2. Ibid p 190.

3. For a description of these Copper Plates and their possible dates, see Appendix C.

lower caste people going to their nearest wealthy Syrian family for the settlement of disputes and protection from enemies. They regard the Syrians as their lawful masters.

Religiously too these Christians seem to have been well established. When Cosmos has written that in Male "where the pepper grows" there ~~was~~ a prosperous and well organised christian community, it leaves no room to argue that he meant Parthia or some other part of the world. However He has also mentioned that their bishops were appointed from Persia¹. When it is remembered that the Church of Persia at this time was under the Nestorian Patriarch of Babylon, it seems hard to reconcile the tradition of the Syrians with what outside historians have written. That they have always been loyal to the Jacobite Patriarch of Antioch is the firm belief of the Syrian Church. But besides the testimony of Cosmos, there are also other important documents which indicate that at the time the Portuguese arrived and before, the Syrian bishops were Nestorians under the Patriarch of Babylon².

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1. Sir Henry Yule's Edition of "Cathay and the Way Thither"
Vol. 1. Introduction. p CLXXI.
 2. The Malabar Syrian Church. Rev. Ittyeran Eappen, pps.

And if it is true that Thomas of Cana, who brought the Syrian Christians over to Malabar, was a Nestorian as supposed in the European Church Histories, the view that the Syrian Church was Nestorian until the Portuguese came, gains support.

Though the European scholars are almost unanimous in maintaining that the Church of Malabar was Nestorian, the Roman Catholics have made serious attempts to prove that that Church was always Catholic, while the Syrians hold they were Jacobites.

After 800 A.D. it would appear that the Indian Church broke off its connection with the Metropolitan of Persia, until 1490. There seems to be only one instance of intercourse during this time between this Church and the Persian. It was in 880 A.D. when two bishops came to Quilon as a result of persecutions at home. But after this event for a period of more than seven centuries, we have no authentic record of the coming here of any bishop from the Eastern Church. There seems to be a haze over this period of the history of the Indian Church, for the records for the history of this period are very meagre. Consequently, to understand the real state of the Syrian Church during these obscure ages, we have to turn to the letters and writings of Missionaries who have come to India from the 14th century onwards, and also examine the two St. Thomas Crosses.

Dr. Burnell is of opinion that the earliest settlements in South India were Persian and that a few inscriptions still remain which belong to that period.¹ The most famous of these inscriptions, he says, is the miracle-working cross of St. Thomas at the Mount near Madras. There are two crosses of a similar make which can be seen in the Syrian Church at Kottayam. Of these two crosses the earlier appears to be the one in the South wall of the Kottayam Old Church. Judging from the formation of the letters Dr. Burnell² places this cross and the one at the Mount not later than the seventh or eighth century. The other cross behind a side altar of the same church, is dated at least two centuries later. Besides a line in Pahlavi it contains also one in the ordinary Estranghela character.

Scholars have given various readings, and consequently various translations, of the inscriptions around the cross. The inscription on the cross at the Mount and on the older cross at Kottayam has been thus rendered by Dr. Burnell³. "In punishment by the cross was the suffering of this one, who is the true Christ, God above and Guide ever pure". Dr. Haug⁴ translates it thus: "He that

1. Burnell's South Indian Palaeography, p. 7, London 1878.

2. Indian Antiquary, Vol. 3. p. 311.

3. *ibid* p. 311-316.

4. Syrian Church in Malabar. Panjikaran. pp 25.

believes in the Messiah and in God in the Height and also in the Holy Ghost is in the grace of Him who suffered the pain of the Cross". A still different rendering is that by Dr. West ¹ which reads thus: "What freed the true Messiah, the forgiving, the upbraiding from hardship? the crucifixion from the tree and the anguish of this".

The translation given by Dr. Burnell seems to be admitted to be the best.

A Roman Catholic author draws evidence from these inscriptions to prove that the Syrian Church was Catholic at the time and not Nestorian. He says "It is clear from it (Dr. Burnell's Translation) that the One who suffered punishment by the cross 'is the true Christ and God above' i.e., He had the true human nature and the Divine, and was therefore, at the time of the crucifixion, both man and God". This belief, he says, is opposed to Nestorianism, which inculcates that only the man Christ suffered. So he concludes that "these bas-relief crosses declare one of the doctrines of the Catholic Church, and they must have been planted here as monuments of the Catholic Religion by some Persian Catholic Missionaries. This conclusion is confirmed by the fact that the Metropolitan of Persia was Catholic at the date attributed to the crosses by Dr. Burnell"².

1. Syrian Church of Malabar. Panjikaran. pp25.

2. Ibid pp26.

Though until now Western scholars generally have supposed that these crosses have been put up by Nestorians, it seems there is not evidence enough to conclude that the Church was Nestorian, even if the inscriptions suggested Nestorian doctrines, which is disputed. Moreover, two noted Panlavi scholars, Dr. G. P. T. Winckworth of Cambridge, and Dr. Ernst Herzfeld of Berlin, have made a new translation of the inscription on the crosses at Kottayam. According to them, the famous inscription has to be rendered thus: "My Lord Christ, have mercy upon Afrās, son of Chaharbūkht, the Syrian, who cut this"¹. Their translation which differs so much from the earlier versions might, if accepted, close some avenues of controversy.

To decide whether the Syrian Church was Nestorian, Catholic or Jacobite, does not seem to be one of our main tasks at present, however. So we follow history.

The next event in the history of the Church is the arrival in 880 A.D. of two bishops, Mar Sapor and Mar Prodh. Le Quien says² that "these bishops were Chaldaeans and had come to Quilon soon after its foundation. They were men illustrious for their sanctity, and their memory was held sacred in the Malabar Church. They constructed many churches and, during their lifetime, the Christian religion flourished especially in the kingdom of Diamper".

1. Introduction to Indian Church of St. Thomas, K. V. Renga Swami Iyer, Trivandrum. 1929.

2. Quoted in Syrian Church of Malabar. Panjikanam 27.

These bishops, aided by the people, and with the permission of the king of Quilon, made some converts, built churches and strengthened the Syrian community every way. For a second time the Malabar church grew into prosperity. It was at this time that Syrians again received privileges and titles recorded on the Quilon Church Copper Plates¹. They were made lords over extensive lands with privilege of trying their offenders themselves; they were exempted from taxes and could collect duty on dutiable goods. The names "Syrians", Nasrāni, and the title "Mahā Pillai" (meaning 'great person', now corrupted to Māppila) came into common use. Dr. Day² says that at this time the Syrians were greatly respected as they were trustworthy and loyal subjects; and the prince who ruled over most of them was feared most by his neighbours, as the Syrians were always armed and experts in fighting. They were the hereditary over-lords and protectors to many of the low-castes including the Carpenters, Blacksmiths and other artisans. If any Syrian was insulted or his title or privilege disputed by any Hindu, they would all join together and decide the punishment for the offender. The penalty for beating a christian was death; or, according to the wealth and social position of the insulted person, the offender

1. See Appendix C 2.

2. Land of the Perumals. pp 219.

had to make a silver or gold likeness of a hand and present it to the Church. Except the Jews and the Brahmans, only the Syrians could erect a 'mandapam' (sort of gateway) in front of their houses. The privilege of riding an elephant, too, exclusively belonged to these sects and the members of the royal family. This prosperity and strength of the christian community resulted in their electing a king for themselves. Their last king was a wealthy Hindu-convert, called Valliārvattath (Beliarte)¹ after his family name. His capital was Diamper.

About this, Bishop Middleton was so convinced that he has said that however sceptical one may be about the ancient history of the Malabar christians, it is quite certain that by the beginning of the ninth century they had recieved valuable privileges from the native princes, and that they were strong to elect a king of their own to establish their independence and preserve their strength. But the demise of the last of their kings without issue left them subjects of the rajah of Cochin, whom they supported with men and money.²

Dr. Buchanan also learned this fact; he says, "when Vasco de Gama arrived at Cochin, in the year 1503, he saw the sceptre of the christian king; for the Syrian Christians had formerly regal power in Malayalam. The name or title of

1. Christian Researches. Buchanan. pp183.
 2. Lives of the Missionaries, India, 3rd series. pp54-55/

their last king was Beliarte;and he,dying without issue, the dominion devolved on the king of Cochin and Diamper"¹

Thus before the arrival of the Portuguese the Syrians were at the zenith of their prosperity.Gibbon² has written that in war and craftsmanship,and,perhaps,in character too, they stood foremost among the inhabitants of Hindustan. The farmers among them prospered in cocoanut farming,the traders monopolised the pepper business and the soldiers were the back-bone of the native armies.Though they were subjects of the native rajahs,it was only the Metropolitan of Angamale who exercised complete authority over them.

About their beliefs and practices at the time the Portuguese came,Bishop Middleton says³ that no sort of images were permitted in their churches.Confession was not one of their practices;and they had never heard of Purgatory.Common people were grossly ignorant of religious matters as facilities for their instruction were few;and the Syriac services helped to keep them further in the dark.Nevertheless they were greatly different from their neighbours in leading a virtuous life,and in their noble conduct.Even their enemies testify to their honest,moral life,their obedience to parents and their respect of grey hairs.

Thus prospered the Syrian Church,whether Nestorian Jacobite or Catholic,until the sixteenth century,when a cold blast from the West began to threaten the burning Torch.

1.Christian Researches pp152.

2.Diehl and Fall of the Roman Empire.Vol.6.Ch.47.pp64.

3.Lives of the Missionaries,India,3rd series.ppb6-58.

Chapter 4.

A Blast From The West.

As Carlyle has said,"Fortune has been ever accounted inconstant;and each dog has but **his** day".

Towards the close of the fifteenth century, the little community of Christians in Malabar were gradually slipping down from the high pinnacle of prestige they had enjoyed for the past few centuries. Their regal power gone, their strength began to wane, and their neighbours were not slow to take cognisance of this weakening to further their own interests. Soon, the once powerful Christians began to be persecuted little by little by the Mohammedans and Hindus who, until then, feared and ~~was~~ respected them. Thus the pendulum swings from one side to the other.

It was at such a time that Vasco de Gama arrived in Malabar. On hearing that the King of Portugal from whom he came was a Christian, the Syrians in Cranganore sent some representatives to Vasco de Gama, to request help and protection. The interview they had with him is thus described in the "Asia Portuguzae"¹: "Here (at Cochin) Don Vasco recieved ambassadors who said they came from some Christian inhabitants of that neighbouring country, the metropolis whereof was Cranganore, and they were to the number of 30,000, that St. Thomas had preached to their forefathers, that they were subject to the Patriarch of Armenia, that they were infested by the pagans, that they

1. Translated by John Stevens t.l.p.67 London 1695, quoted by Panjikaran in Syrian Church in Malabar. pp32.

knew he was an officer of the most Catholic King of Europe to whom they submitted themselves delivering into his hands the Rod of Justice. This Rod was red, about the length of a sceptre, ends tipped with silver, with three bells at the top. They were dispatched with hopes of a powerful assistance.

Thus, in the hope of deliverance from unfriendly neighbours, the simple-minded Syrians swore allegiance to an unknown foreign King, trusting in his Christianity. We shall soon see this was a move 'out of the frying pan into the fire'.

For a few more years, relationships with the Portuguese do not seem to have been very strong. In 1503 A.D. a wealthy trader from Portugal, by the name of Albuquerque, arrived at Quilon and, with the permission of the King of Venad (comprising Quilon and S. Travencore), began a trade in pepper, whereby he came across several wealthy Syrian merchants. A friendship sprung up between them and this Catholic, and later, when he knew about the sad plight of his friends, Albuquerque used his influence with the king and regained for the Syrians some of their long-lost privileges. Extremely glad and grateful, the Syrians invited him to their churches and told him about its history. Soon Albuquerque managed to get for them a priest named Roderigue, who baptised many, priests being absent among them for a long time, and they being uncertain whether they had been baptised or not at any time.¹

After this, for a period of nearly forty years, it seems, there were no dealings between the Syrians and the Portuguese, who were now busy building monasteries and establishing strongholds.

In 1545, John D'Albuquerque who had come to Goa as the first Portuguese Arch-bishop, sent to Cranganore a Franciscan, Father Vincent de Lagos, to educate the Syrians and induce them to accept the Roman Catholic faith if possible. But the Syrians were strong against the supremacy of the Pope and some other articles of faith; and so Father Vincent's efforts were futile. He ascribed this failure to the want of a Seminary, and accordingly reported to his superior. A Seminary was soon built at Cranganore and several young Syrians were given a Latin education. But when they were ready for ordination, the Syrians objected to having them in their churches, on account of their Catholic education. So in 1578, another Seminary was built at a place called Vaippikotta, where the education was in Syriac and some of the Syrian rites also were performed. Still the orthodox Syrians kept aloof from the Seminary.

When their supposed 'Rights' failed to move the Syrians, the Portuguese resorted to their certain 'Might'. It was their 'christian duty' to get these Syrians by hook or crook. They preferred the latter! They believed that a church without a Head would easily flounder. So they caught Mar Joseph, the Metropolitan of the Syrian Church

and sent him on a nice little trip to Portugal, which magnificent country he could visit and then go to Rome! Fortunately for him, the ruler of Portugal took pity on him at Lisbon, and sent him back to Goa with a royal brief, the essence of which was, that on his return he was to be given charge of the Syrian Church which he was to persuade into the Roman faith.

Never expecting to see Mar Joseph again, the Syrians meanwhile, requested the Patriarch of Babylon for another Bishop, and got a certain Mar Abraham. This dignitary had to disguise himself to escape the vigilant and suspicious Portuguese. When he arrived in Malabar, however, he was accorded a warm welcome by the people.

Though Mar Joseph had the royal papers from Portugal, the Archbishop of Goa was not quite willing to send him to Malabar; but soon he changed his mind, grew wise. He found there was his one chance to cause a split among the Syrians. So he let loose Mar Joseph among them.

Soon there were two parties among the Syrians, one for Mar Abraham, and the other for Mar Joseph. As the stronger party was Mar Abraham's, Mar Joseph wrote to Goa charging him with heresy. The Portuguese, who were only looking for an excuse to interfere, at once caught Mar Abraham and sent him to Portugal on a forced visit to the West. But a storm intervened, the ship on which Mar Abraham was being transported was driven to the

Mozambique shores of Africa, and the plucky bishop managed to make his escape. Somehow he reached the Patriarch of Babylon, who deputed him to Malabar again. However, on mature consideration, Mar Abraham decided it was healthier for him to visit Rome, and ~~receive~~ the Papal Blessing, before returning to Malabar. He was re-ordained in the Catholic faith at Venice, on promising to be a loyal Roman Catholic. Thus with the authority of the Holy Catholic Church he ~~once again~~ returned to Malabar, triumphantly.¹

Now Mar Joseph was ruling undisputed over the Syrians, but rumours that he was again teaching the old Syrian faith reached even Rome; and in 1567, Pope Pius V. ordered him to be brought to Rome. So the Portuguese dispatched him to the West a second time, and the unfortunate man was never more heard of².

When Mar Abraham reached Goa and heard about the fate of his rival, he was glad and thought that he could now be Metropolitan without trouble. The arrival of this man however, disconcerted the Portuguese, who had other designs; and they therefore determined to prevent his return to the coast. The Archbishop of Goa declared that the Pope's briefs were null and void as having been obtained under false pretenses, and Mar Abraham was confined to the Dominican Convent at Goa.³ This man somehow seems to have

1. Land of the Perumals pp222., Chapman's Church History pl59.

2. Historical Notices of Cochin. pp 11-12.

3. Syrian Church in Malabar. Panjikanan pp39.

had a peculiar knack for escaping from the Portuguese! He managed to get out of the Convent, and reached his own Diocese. The Syrians recieved him gladly; but the Portuguese authorities at Cochin and other places 'wanted' him badly. He was, however, too clever for them.

When news about all these things reached Rome, the Pope issued a summons to Mar Abraham to attend the Provincial Council of Goa. This was dated 28th November, 1576. With this summons the Archbishop of Goa enclosed also a pardon, so that any fear of attack and imprisonment may not detain him from attending it. Considering the growing power of the Portuguese, and the difficulties of dodging them all his life, Mar Abraham decided that it was wiser to attend the Council and pretend friendship. This he did. But at the Council he was compelled to denounce his faith and swear allegiance to the Pope. He had also to promise that he would abide by the rules of that Council, that he would burn or send to them for correction all the Syriac Liturgy, and that, as the ordinations he had done were invalid, he would re-ordain all those priests with Catholic rites. But on his return from the Council, all he did was to re-ordain some of the priests; in all other matters he retained the old practices and acknowledged only the Patriarch of Babylon as his superior. He also wrote a letter to the Patriarch that it was only the fear of the Portuguese, who had grown so dangerous, that drove him to the Council. Though the

Portuguese stopped this letter and read the contents, it is not known what they did regarding it¹.

For the next fourteen years the relations between Mar Abraham and the Portuguese seem to have been normal, though not very friendly. But trouble came from another quarter. Whether Mar Abraham requested for a successor as some say, or not, there arrived on the Coast, a bishop, Mar Simon, who very soon grew popular with a large number of Syrians and other natives. The best authorities are agreed that he was a Nestorian bishop. He fixed his seat at Kaduthuruthi, gathered some adherents and began to call himself the Metropolitan of the St. Thomas Christians. Afraid of the strength of his new rival, Mar Abraham wrote to the Portuguese charging him with heresy. Though they were not particularly favourable to him, the Portuguese thought it their duty to side with him who had the Pope's blessing. But the immense popularity of Mar Simon made it dangerous for them to attempt force on him. So this time they resorted to trickery. They told him it was his solemn duty and high privilege to visit Rome and receive the blessings of His Most Holiness the Pope (who was just aching to bless him!), that on his return he would have so many advantages, besides being formally confirmed as the Metropolitan of Malabar. The poor fish fell into the trap and sailed for Rome; not, however before appointing Jacob, a Syrian priest, as his

I. Land of the Perumals. Day. pp. 223.

Vicar-General, to look after the affairs of the Church until his return. But since he sailed for Rome in the respectable company of some of the Catholic Christians nothing has been ever heard of him.¹

In 1584 Mar Abraham in virtue of the powers granted him by the Patriarch, appointed Archdeacon George, bishop-elect of Palur, to be his coadjutor and successor.

Don Mattias, the Archbishop of Goa, in 1590, convened the Fourth Council of Goa to which Mar Abraham refused to go when invited. He also refused to ordain the clerical students of the Vaippikotta Seminary² because he was asked to ordain them according to the Latin Ritual. Thereupon the Portuguese sent unfavourable reports of his conduct to the Pope, accusing him of Nestorian heresy. From this time onwards for a time, Mar Abraham was a religious suspect, who continued to pretend that he was in sympathy with the Roman Catholics, but practised the old Syriac rites and taught the old Syriac faith, sometimes openly non-co-operating with the Portuguese, though often only just indifferent.

1. Historical Notices of Cochin p.12., Land of the Perumals
Francis Day, pp223.

2. Travencore State Manual. Vol.2. pp 171.

Chapter 5."Wandering Clouds".

Five years elapsed. Pope Clement VIII was in the Vatican, but all was not well with the Holy Catholic Church. His Most Holiness condescended to notice that far away in Malabar, there still remained the little group of St. Thomas Christians who was under the heretic Mar Abraham, but who really ought to be under the guiding hand of His Holiness and the True Church. It was the Christian duty of His Holiness to gather into the fold this misguided wandering sheep. Excommunicate the heretic, and appoint a Roman Catholic Vicar-Apostolic of Malabar! That was the idea. His Holiness decided it.

In 1595 there landed in India, the immortal Archbishop of Goa, Father Alexius de Menezes. This young man, of thirty-five was certainly destined to play a great role in the history of the St. Thomas Christians; he was perhaps conscious of his great 'mission'. As soon as he landed in India, he received briefs from His Holiness the Pope, regarding the excommunication of Mar Abraham, and the possession of the Syrian Church and bishopric. On enquiry Menezes found that Mar Abraham was also guilty of writing to Babylon for a successor when Catholic bishops could easily^{be} procured! He certainly did not like Mar Abraham, and decided to do something about it.

First he sent orders to all Port-officers to detain any priest from the West trying to enter Malabar,

and report to him immediately; thus all communications between Malabar and Babylon were cut off. The intended successor to Mar Abraham and several other priests were prevented from entering the country at all.¹

After cutting off the Syrian Church from Babylonia, this determined Archbishop started on a very vigorous campaign to Christianise the Syrians. He sent letters to the Vicar Jacob, to Mar Abraham, and to the Archdeacon George. The purport of these letters was that it would be better for the churches under their care to be Roman Catholic, and that in case they were inclined to consider the proposal he would be very glad to help them, both financially and otherwise. As a result of this invitation, the Vicar Jacob tried all the more to create among his people a hatred of the Catholics. This went on for a time until he died. In 1597 the old Mar Abraham also conveniently died. Thus passed away two of the strongest possible adversaries of Menezes; and the Roman Catholic faith, and no one was happier over it than Alex Menezes.

It was on the 16th of February, 1597 that he heard of the fortunate death of Mar Abraham. The very same day he appointed a Jesuit Father Francis Roz, to administer the Malabar diocese. But this appointment was too glaring a violation of the claims of the Archdeacon to be tamely submitted to by the Syrians.

1. Giddes' History of the Church of Malabar. pp 40-41

Quoted in The Malabar Syrian Church. Eappen. pp23.

At this bold action of the Archbishop, the Syrian community "was so thoroughly roused, and so strong was the feeling excited, that the Syrians would no longer permit any Latin priest to officiate in their churches".¹ Toned down by this unexpected resistance, the Council at Goa became more prudent, and at their instance, ~~the~~, the appointment of Father Roz was cancelled and the Archdeacon was reinstated in his rights.

After this impolitic move on the part of the Archbishop and the Portuguese, their ultimate object became very plain to the Syrians. They understood that the whole policy of the Portuguese, for which they had been working for a century nearly, was gradually to annex them by a process of Latinization. Soon the Archdeacon and his followers held a council at Angamale, his head-quarters, and swore allegiance to their ancient faith which they would never forsake in any circumstances. They also decided not to recognise any bishop or prelate who was not appointed by the Patriarch of Babylon, nor to permit any Latin priest to enter any of their churches. They all took the oath and spread the resolutions all over the Malabar diocese.²

For a time the Syrians hated the Latin priests to such an extent as to drive them from their neighbourhood.

1. Lingerings of Light in Dark Land. Whitehouse. pp92.

2. Malabar Syrian Church. Rev. Eappen. pp24.

On noticing that the Latin priests were not bold enough to venture into the midst of these wild Syrians, Archbishop Menezes himself decided to go. He wrote to the Archdeacon about his intended visit to his Churches and requested cooperation. The Archdeacon knew that his followers were not strong enough to resist the Portuguese. Nor could he hope to receive any help from the native kings, who were themselves trying to curry favour with the strong foreign power. Resorting to the safer way, therefore, he promised cooperation and loyalty to the Catholic faith in his letter, but retained his ancient creeds and rites for practical use.¹

The Archbishop knew this, and was convinced that nothing but his personal efforts would ever change these stubborn Christians. So he set out on a tour, visiting the churches of Malabar, duly protected by an armed guard of faithful Portuguese soldiers. This was on the 27th December 1598. The Portuguese governor and his retinue gave him a warm welcome at Cochin. Menezes then discussed the object of his tour with the governor and all other important persons there and secured their favour. Next he approached the king of Cochin, promised to procure for him the title of 'Brother-in-Arms' of Portugal² and thus made him promise a help of 50,000 native soldiers in case of need.

1. Land of the Perumals pp. 225.

2. Syrian Church in Malabar. Panjikaran. pp. 46.

After thus winning over the civil powers, the Archbishop issued an order to the Archdeacon to report himself to him at Cochin. But there was no sign of the Syrian for a long time. Ascribing this to fear, Menezes sent him assurances of personal safety and pardon of all previous faults. On receipt of this, the Archdeacon gathered together his priests and people, who decided that it would be inadvisable to disobey this Archbishop, but that he should go with a retinue of 3000 armed soldiers, and be as friendly as possible to Menezes, discussing, and conceding to, trifling matters and delaying the more important ones as long as possible so that, in the meantime, either the long-expected bishop from Babylon may arrive or the Archbishop may return.

Accordingly, followed by an army of 3000 under the leadership of two expert warriors, Archdeacon George of the Syrian Christians, set out to Cochin, to discuss with Archbishop Menezes of Goa, equally well-armed, matters regarding the most peaceful religion in the world! The Portuguese governor and his party received them heartily at the gates of Cochin, and thence they were escorted to the presence of Menezes, who also gave them a cheerful welcome. However, when the governor, the Archbishop and the Archdeacon with two guards, retired into a room to discuss matters, and the door was closed, the people outside grew so suspicious and excited that there was a great commotion which stopped only after the Archdeacon went out and assured them of his safety.

After a few minutes' conversation the Archbishop intimated that he would like to go round and visit the Syrian Churches, and invited the Archdeacon's co-operation, which the latter promised. Next day they were to meet at the Seminary at Vaippikotta, but the Archdeacon failed to be there on purpose. Menezes visited the Seminary and preached in the church telling the people about Purgatory and such other things that the Syrians had never heard of. But they persisted in praying in Syriac and referring to the Patriarch of Babylon as their head. So Menezes made a declaration of secession from the Patriarch, forced the Archdeacon and some other priests to sign it, and posted it on the door of their church. The Syrians were greatly enraged at this audacity, and wanted to fight the Archbishop. But the practical Archdeacon pointed out the foolishness of such an attempt against the strong Portuguese, and pacified them.

The Portuguese governor and a few others pointed out to the Archbishop that it was not a wise policy thus to alienate the people, but Menezes did not care. The very next day he set out to a place called Parur. Here the people were strongly anti-Catholic. Two members of a prominent family there visited Rome, but on their return were not permitted to live in the neighbourhood because probably they had some tinge of Catholicism in them!¹

Then they heard that Menezes was going to visit them,
1. Malabar Syrian Church. Eappen. pp30.

they pulled out their old rusted swords, and went to the church to give him a 'hot' welcome. When he found that the church was full of armed men, Menezes sent back his followers to avoid a commotion, and walked boldly into their midst with only two priests by his side. Tactfully, he blessed the people and made a stirring speech regarding the One and only True Church, which he enjoined them all to obey and revere. But when he invited them to accept his faith, the people replied that it would be healthier for him and better for all concerned if he would let them alone. Menezes, however, was not a coward. He challenged any one to speak against the Holy Catholic Church, and with a wronged and painfully misunderstood face told them that it was only the teachings of Jesus and their Apostle Thomas that he preached. Still the people were not moved. He had to return to Alengād¹, his next place of visit, disappointed and greatly displeased with the day's work.

At Alengād too he was not very successful. He saw the church filled with women and other household articles, as the native rajahs of Parūr and Alengād were at war. Menezes began to talk to groups of these Syrians about the Catholic Church, but on hearing that a few of the armed men from Parur had followed him there, he thought it advisable to return to Cochin. So he left quickly and reached Chowra, a town in Cochin.

1. Mangād' in Portuguese Letters.

2. Land of the Perumals. p. 227-228.

At Chowra, another sort of reception awaited him. He stayed in the boat at the landing place and sent word to the people to gather in the church. But the Syrians locked their church, and everyone of them, including women and children, stayed in their houses. The whole place looked desolate and deserted. The Archbishop was sore disappointed; His followers began to fear for his safety and requested him to give up the matter and return to Goa. But he was a determined man and would not give in.

Soon he heard that the Archdeacon was hiding in that locality and Menezes wrote a very loving letter to him, expressing his desire to see him just once more before leaving for Goa. After conferring with his people, the Archdeacon again went to see ^{the} Catholic bishop, with an armed guard. In this interview he agreed to the convocation of a Synod but urged that Menezes, in his tour through the country as a foreign prelate, should abstain from all essentially episcopal acts, as these would be very hurtful to the legitimate and just claims of the Patriarch, and should confine his ministrations to preaching and blessing the people. The Archdeacon had to agree not to rouse the people by any means, or move about with armed guards. They mutually agreed to all these and signed a formal agreement. Thus armed with the Archdeacon's permission, Menezes had a right to the people's sympathy.

The Archbishop's next move was to visit the churches and preach to the people whose sympathy was now secured. First he went to a place called Kānjōor, where the Archdeacon also reached in time to inform the people about the agreement and request them to be friendly to Menezes. But when the latter gave a sermon on the infallibility of the Pope, the Archdeacon and the people were both offended. Complaining of sudden indisposition, the Archdeacon went away to Chowra. Menezes went to Quilon from there and on the way stopped at Purakad, preached to the people and converted many of them, and baptised them in the Roman faith, contrary to their agreement.

Returning to Cochin, he annexed another church there, Mulanthuruthi. When the Archdeacon heard of these breeches of promise, he issued a notice to all the Syrian churches warning them against the Archbishop. He also sent messages to the native rajahs that the attempt of the Archbishop to force his people into the Catholic faith was really a move to bring their loyal subjects under the King of Portugal. He also imposed a heavy fine on the church in Mulanthuruthi, for showing too much favour to his enemy.

The next place that Menezes visited was Diamper. As there were no ordinations during the two years of confusion in Malabar, several candidates were waiting for that ceremony. With his characteristic foresight, Menezes decided to ordain them and announced the matter. He also sent an invitation to the Archdeacon to help him with the

function. But the latter only pointed out that such an act from the Archbishop would be a violation of their agreement, and as such, a hindrance to the forthcoming Synod. But Menezes persisted in conducting the ordination. So the Syrian suggested that he ordain only graduates from the Vaippikotta Seminary. Menezes, however, was determined to ride rough-shod over him. Finding that his efforts to compromise were all in vain, the Archdeacon issued special orders to the candidates not ^{to} receive ordination from Menezes, and also a general circular to all the priests not to allow the Archbishop in their churches or to take part in any ceremony he performed. This circular reached Diamper only after the Archbishop had conducted some services. When it reached them however, some of the people asked Menezes to leave their church, but he still went on conducting services, until on the appointed day he ordained thirty-seven deacons, and made them swear to be loyal to the Pope¹.

After this he proceeded to Kaduthuruthi, another important christian centre. Here, by lavish gifts and promises he made friends with several people, especially some leaders of the laity. He held attractive Latin services for which musicians were brought from Cochin. A feeble opposition from a party of thirty priests and some men was easily overcome, and the Church was Catholicised

1. Land of the Perumals. pp 229.

2. Historical Notices of Cochin. p 11.

Some of the people at Kaduthuruthi complained to their native queen about the Archbishop, and she had also a suspicion that he was trying to subject her people to the Portuguese King. She therefore issued orders to the effect that unless he left her kingdom within three days Menezes was liable to the death penalty. But he replied that he had no serious intention of leaving his work unfinished and that he was sure God and the Portuguese King would punish the queen if anything happened to him in her lands. As the queen dropped the matter there, the Archbishop grew bolder. He drove out of the church a priest whom he had ex-communicated. He compelled several other priests and prominent men to accept the Catholic faith. Then he proposed to depose the Archdeacon, and appoint in his stead another Syrian who was now a Catholic. But some of the priests sympathised with the Archdeacon, and requested Menezes to let them try and bring him around to their side. So Menezes deputed six of the clergy and gave them a time-limit of twenty days to convert the Archdeacon. However, though they advised and entreated him, the Archdeacon was firm and would not yield.

At Kaduthuruthi also Menezes performed an ordination ceremony. Francis Roz, who was at this time at the Vaippikotta Seminary, has testified that after the Holy Communion, when the image of Our Lady was carried on a procession, the Syrians closed their eyes and cried 'take away this ugliness; we are Christians and do not worship

idols'.¹ This attitude shows that Catholicism was thrust upon them by Menezes and a few of his followers. However, the fact is that gradually the Church of Kaduthurathi also became Roman Catholic. This was partly due to the love of the people which he managed to deserve through humanitarian work, visiting the sick and helping the poor. He also cleverly hinted that it was the duty of every minister of God to help the people with all they have, and that it was a shame that Syrian bishops and priests did not do so.

After thus annexing the church of Kaduthuruthi, he visited Mulanthuruthi again, but found the people very different from what they were on his first visit. They had locked the church so that no one may gather there. Fearing hostilities, Menezes did not land, but wrote an urgent letter to the king of Cochin requesting him to depute his Dewan (minister) to the task of compelling the people to open the church, which, the Archbishop claimed, was his. Though unwillingly, the dewan was sent; and in the name of the king, he commanded the people to open the church and obey the Archbishop in all matters. Thus some of the Syrians were forced to co-operate with him.

Taking the dewan with him, Menezes proceeded to Diamper, where, again using the royal authority, he got control of the church. After conducting a few services he announced the excommunication of the Archdeacon, who, he said, was a heretic working against the Pope and the Holy Catholic Religion.

The sympathy of the people was secured by generous monetary gifts to the leaders and comforting words to the sick and distressed. Thus using the unwilling king of Cochin as a tool, and cleverly handling the poor and the sick, Menezes gained complete control of the Church of Diamper too.

Three important churches of the diocese were now under the Archbishop. He had also secured the favour of the common people by various tactics. The rulers of the land were all easily falling for his flattery and promises and the leaders of the laity appreciated his generous gifts enormously. Many of the native kings had issued orders that Menezes should be given friendly greeting and all necessary co-operation and help all over their territories. These things made the Archdeacon sad and dejected.

At this psychological moment, Menezes wrote a long and loving letter to him inviting him to yield and be a friend; and without waiting for the reply, set out to visit the church at Nadamel, which was strongly anti-Catholic. Here the people were ready armed for a fight, and when he had again recourse to the king's dewan, they all left the place, closing the church. Menezes was beaten there!

Sore disappointed, the Archbishop returned home, feeling sad and gloomy at the obstinacy of these Syrians who would not be saved. It was then that he received the reply from the Archdeacon that he was willing to yield!

Chapter 5.The Storm Bursts.

It was a day of excitement for Archbishop Menezes. The achievement of his great ambition was at last in sight. He knew that with the Archdeacon on his side he could very easily bring every Syrian church under the supremacy of the Pope. So within a few minutes after he had received the Archdeacon's letter, Menezes had written down about ten conditions to impose on him. Some of the conditions were, that the ^{Archdeacon} Archbishop must denounce the Nestorian faith and the Patriarch of Babylon and accept the Pope, the Roman Catholic faith, and the Officers appointed by the Pope; that he must submit to the Archbishop, for burning or correction as he may choose, every book concerning the Syrian creeds or rites; that thereafter, whenever Menezes visited any church he should accompany him to make the people co-operate with him; and that he should notify every church regarding the forth coming Synod and secure their whole-hearted sympathy. Menezes wrote these conditions and sent them to the Archdeacon, along with a letter asking him to report himself at Cochin within twenty days if he were inclined to accept them. Then he went to Cochin to make sure once more of the promised help from the native king and the Portuguese governor.

For the next few days Menezes was busy at Cranganore planning the program for the Synod. Here he received the Archdeacon's reply that though he was not unwilling to accept the conditions, he could not go to

Cranganore within the time allotted. suspecting that the kings of Cochin and Alengad had some hand in encouraging this objection, Menezes, through clever handling, managed to make the same two kings write to the Archdeacon that the interview should on no account be delayed. Still the Syrian was not bold enough to trust himself to the Archbishop at Cranganore; so he suggested a meeting at the Vaippikotta Seminary. Menezes went there, secured the signature of the Archdeacon, and, in consultation with the clergy, decided to hold the proposed Synod at Diamper, on the 20th of June, 1599. Accordingly, on the sixth of May, the Archdeacon and the Archbishop together issued circulars to all the churches in Malabar asking them to send four representatives each, including the pastor and the trustees.

Menezes then wrote out every resolution he wanted to move in the Synod, and had them translated and published in the vernacular. Moreover, to insure a strong party on his side, he ordained no less than fifty persons at Parur; and to some of the important priests, he made gifts of jewelled, gold and silver crosses and other costly articles. He again renewed his acquaintance with the native kings and their officers, and increased his Portuguese help.

The Portuguese governor at Cochin followed by armed guards, was also present at the Synod.

At the Synod, the Archdeacon and twelve others were appointed a committee to examine and approve the decrees which the Archbishop had drafted. A priest was deputed to do the translation work. After some such preliminaries, the main business of the Synod started, and one by one the rules for the future guidance of the Syrian Church were laid definitely. Though there was some opposition to ^{a few} ~~others~~ of them at first, the strength of the Archbishop's party soon disillusioned the dissenters, and then onwards the Synod was a "mere farce".¹

Finally the whole of Malabar was divided into seventy-five vicarages. Every church that could not maintain a Vicar was joined to the neighbouring one.

In justice to the Archbishop and to all who had any part in convening the Synod, it must be admitted that some of its Sessions and Decrees were very useful and praiseworthy.² The Christians were forbidden to sell Arrack (native liquor), to join their Hindu neighbours in the sham fights which took place during the Hindu festival of Onam, in August; they were not to resort to witches and fortune-tellers, to consult them about such things as lucky and unlucky days, or to submit at the command of their Hindu rulers to such ordeals as handling

1. Hough. Christianity in India. Vol. 1. P. 462. London 1839

2. Whitehouse. Lingerings of Light in a Dark Land. pp 114.

bars of red-hot iron, thrusting the hand into boiling oil, or swimming across a river infested with crocodiles. They were also prohibited from observing the Nambudhiri custom of the separation of a mother from both religious and domestic ceremonies for forty days after the birth of a boy and eighty days after the birth of a girl.

These few salutary reforms, however, were obtained at an enormous cost, the cost involved in the loss of a very old Liturgy, and in the substitution of a new rite, the Syro-Malabar Rite, with Syriac as the liturgical language into which most of the Latin Missals and ceremonies were translated with additions taken from the old Liturgy, and with certain peculiarities preserved from the ancient rite, which did not savour of Nestorian heresy. Except that prayers were still permitted in Syriac, in all other matters the Church of Malabar was changed according to the will of the Archbishop. It was decreed that all the Syriac books should be burned or corrected by the Archbishop himself, and that the Church should not receive any bishop, prelate, pastor or governor whatsoever, but what shall be immediately appointed by the Holy Apostolical See and the Bishop of Rome,.

The Synod was attended by 813 persons altogether, including 153 ordained ministers. The Christians who kept away from it were mostly the Travencoreans. The Decrees were duly signed by all present, before the Synod ended.

Malayalam copies of the Decrees of the Synod were preserved at the Vaippikotta Seminary and the Church at Angamale. From these, copies were to be taken by every vicar and read, in portions, in the churches from time to time.

On the 26th June, 1599 the Synod came to an end. Menezes had accomplished what he set out to accomplish. But he was not satisfied. The people's hatred of the Latin services had forced him to permit worship in Syriac, but he wanted to see that all heretic books were burned.

So he set out on a tour visiting all the churches that were now under his complete control. He transferred the Syrian head-quarters from Angamale to Cranganore so that it would be nearer the Portuguese strength. Everywhere he went he collected all the Syriac books and burned them ruthlessly. The Syrian priests who were already married were forced either to leave their wife and children or be ex-communicated. Some unhappy husbands made pious pleas and broke the hearts of wives and children; others who loved their family had to suffer excommunication! For now they were 'Christians'!

Suddenly however, the death of the King of Portugal made it imperative for Menzes to return to Goa. He called together his clergy and discussed matters with them, finally leaving them in charge of the diocese for the time being, returned to Goa.

On the 16th of November, 1599, Archbishop Menezes reached Goa after his long absence in Malabar. The people welcomed him with great enthusiasm and the praises of his triumph over the Syrian Church were sung long and loud. It was also very gratifying for him to hear that even after his leaving Malabar, the people remained loyal and the churches were prospering.

Later on Father Francis Roz was appointed by the Pope to be the Bishop of the Malabar Diocese. Thus the Syrian Church fell under the Archbishopric of Goa. In 1604 the veteran Archdeacon George died and with him was ^{chance} buried the last of opposition to the Goa authorities.

Things went along pretty well for a time until in 1617 Father Francis Roz died. A Jesuit Father was appointed in his place, and from that time onwards the Church fell under the rule of a long line of Jesuits. These, it seems, made matters worse for the Syrians, who in consequence began to show signs of unrest. The Jesuits tried to stop the Syrian services, to fill the churches with images, and to oppress all who did not agree with them. Their tyranny and high-handed cruelty became so intolerable that very soon the Syrians were writing petitions to Rome and the Portuguese authorities to save them from the Jesuits.

But Rome never answered, and the Portuguese never cared. Disappointed with all this, and disgusted with the Jesuits, the Syrians took law into their own hands and elected as their leader, Archdeacon Thomas, who was the rightful successor to the late Archdeacon George. They then appealed to the Patriarchs of Egypt, Babylon and Antioch to send them a Metropolitan. As a result, there arrived in Malabar in 1653, a bishop called Mar Ignatius ¹ by the Syrians. But the crafty Jesuits were watching for him and he fell right into their clutches. On hearing this the Syrians held a conference at Diamper and decided upon a plan to kidnap and hold the Jesuit Archbishop. But he was too cunning for them and did not fall into the trap. Then they heard that Mar Ignatius was held prisoner at Cochin and decided to rescue him. Soon a large multitude, fully armed, and under the leadership of their new Archdeacon, advanced to Cochin. Seeing the advancing army the Portuguese took refuge in their Fort and held their cannon ready. The ruler of Cochin, on behalf of the Syrians, commanded them to liberate the Syrian bishop; but they did not. What happened that night, history does not tell. Some authors² say that under cover of darkness the poor bishop was taken to Goa and burned alive; the Syrians say that he was thrown into the

1. Referred to as 'Theodore' in Greek writings and 'Abdulla' in Arabic letters.

2. Historical Notices of Cochin. pp. 12-13.

Land of the Perumals pp. 234-236.

sea at Cochin itself. Anyhow it is certain that the unfortunate man who came in the name of Christ to bless and lead His Church was most cruelly murdered by others who also were there in the name of Christ. So is the Son of Man crucified again and again by people who will never understand Him, until their battlements are broken, their power and prosperity ruined, and their pride turned into humility by the Hand of God!

When the Syrians knew it the next day a deep gloom fell upon them. Weighted down with this grief and nearly bursting with hatred of these cruel tyrants, they gathered at a nearby place called "Kunan Cruz"¹, and there, uncoiling a long rope and holding on to it, they swore, one and all of them, never more to have anything to do with the Jesuits, an oath indelibly written in the Race-Mind of this people. They elected the Archdeacon Thomas as their bishop and swore allegiance to him and their ancient faith for ever more.

Not long after this, the Archdeacon Thomas was formally consecrated by twelve old Presbyters and the Church once again returned to its ancient faith.

Meantime news about all these events reached the Pope, and His Holiness sent out some Carmellite Missionaries to try and bring back the Syrians into the Roman Church.

1. Meaning Crooked Cross.

Two Carmelite Missionaries, Father Vincent and Father Joseph, arrived at Palur in 1657 and learned from the local vicar about the conditions, and the attitude of the Syrians towards the Latinites. They then approached Bishop Thomas and sought co-operation. But he was displeased at their purpose and decided in consultation with his clergy, not to trust any more foreign priests. Orders were soon issued to all the Syrian Churches not to allow the Carmelites to conduct any services in them.

The Jesuits also put all the obstacles they could in the way of these Carmelites, as they were afraid success to the Carmelites meant ruin to their authority and power. Thus the Catholic Church which first brought division in the Syrian Church, was divided now herself.

Realising their helplessness in the circumstances, Father Vincent went to Cochin and sought aid from the Portuguese, who were now very anxious to make some kind of adjustments with the Syrians, whom they had alienated. So they readily helped the Carmelites, and soon the churches of Kaduthuruthi and Kuravalangād accepted them.

The Syrians at this time ^{were} gradually dividing into two sects, the Northerners and the Southerners. Though both acknowledged Bishop Thomas, each had a separate leader too; ~~the~~ the Vicar of Alengād for the Northerners and the Vicar of Kuravalangād for the Southerners. This latter was

a very rich and influential man who favoured the Carmelites to some extent. Through his influence a number of Syrians rallied to the ranks of the Catholics and Bishop Thomas grew uneasy. He at once sent a circular to all the churches warning them against the Carmelites who, he said, were as bad as the Jesuits though different in dress. This circular met with disapproval at Kuravallangād, where the people grew so bold that they questioned the consecration of Bishop Thomas. They suggested that he better resign his post, confess his faults, and make a trip to Rome to obtain the Pope's forgiveness. The Carmelites thus increased their strength, and with the help of the Portuguese, who supplied the music and the military show for their attractive Latin services, gained complete control of the Southerners.

Father Vincent, in consultation with the Portuguese, then decided to gain control of the Northern Church too, and sent an invitation to the Vicar of Alengād. He readily replied that he was willing to co-operate with them. At once the Carmelites proceeded to Alengād and called together the Vicar and several of the chief priests to discuss matters. Soon it became clear that the Syrians were not unwilling to depose their Bishop Thomas or accept the Fathers until an Archbishop arrived from Rome, but that they strongly hated the Jesuits with whom they would not have any thing to do.

All this added to the jealousy of the Jesuits who now hated the Carmelites for their success.

Though disappointed for a time at the mischiefs of the Jesuits, and the obstinacy of the Syrians in some parts, the Carmelites grew stronger day by day: so Bishop Thomas thought it wiser to compromise with them. Accordingly, a mass meeting was proposed at Edapalli. In the early part of the meeting the people decided that, though the consecration of their Bishop was not fully authorised, he deserved their support. But at the next session Bishop Thomas himself got up and admitted that his consecration was invalid. This set the people doubting whether they ought to support him or not, and when the Carmelites threw in their influence against him, the people divided into two parties. The churches at Diamper and Mattam chose to become Catholic; while Alengad, though not unwilling to accept the Carmelites, decided to support Thomas. Thus the Syrian still had strong support.

On the 8th of September 1657, the Carmelites called together a meeting at Mattam, which the trustees of twentyfour churches attended. Here they resolved that it was the duty of every christian church to acknowledge the Pope, and that the consecration of Thomas and the ordinations he held were invalid. But this did not affect the Syrian Bishop. The Carmelites then decided to request the Pope to consecrate Father Joseph as Bishop of Malabar. This enraged the Jesuits and also Bishop Thomas. The former were, however, pacified by the Portuguese.

The Syrian Bishop went to Alengad and defied the Carmalites openly; and they could not do any harm to him because he still had a large following. At last they called a meeting of forty priests at the church of Mattanchery, arranged to leave Father Vincent in charge of the diocese until the Pope's orders came, and thought a return to Rome would be the best thing for them. So they went to Rome, and there the Pope consecrated Father Joseph who once again arrived in Malabar in 1661, as the Bishop of the Diocese.

Left alone in Malabar, Father Vincent was not able to convert many people except a few who were greatly influenced by the native kings. And before the new Bishop arrived, Vincent died and the affairs of the diocese fell into the hands of the Jesuits. So on his arrival, Joseph had to suppress the Jesuits who were still his enemies, before he could start to grapple with the Syrian Bishop.

With the Jesuits brought to terms, Bishop ^{Joseph} ~~Vincent~~ started on a campaign, like his illustrious predecessor Menezes, to make the Syrians 'bigger and better' christians. Fiftytwo churches soon accepted the Catholic faith in spite of the Syrian Bishop's orders to the contrary; and many other churches, ^{Joseph} ~~Vincent~~ forced to accept him by cutting off their sources of income from the native kings. Like Menezes, he went from church to church preaching to the people, helping the poor and comforting

the sick, flattering the leaders, bribing officials, and reprimanding and ex-communicating priests. Many of the Syrian churches were thus annexed to the Catholic faith. Then a conference was held at the palace of Cochin, at which the Syrian Bishop, the Catholic Bishop, the Portuguese governor, and several native officials and Brahmans were present. Here the decision went in favour of Bishop ^{Joseph} ~~Vincent~~, who thus gained control of all the churches.

This conference was, to some extent, a 'Synod of Diamper' to Bishop ^{Joseph} ~~Vincent~~. For soon after it, he started on a tour visiting his churches, burning Syriac books and reorganising the clergy. One of the princes of Cochin was a great friend of the Portuguese, and with his help, Joseph plundered several churches and hunted for the unfortunate Syrian Bishop, who however managed to hide. All the belongings of Thomas were shared between the native prince and the Carmelite Bishop, and all the books and other articles were burned.¹

In spite of all his attempts, some churches in north, especially the church at Angamale, remained staunch on the side of the Syrian Bishop. So for a time he turned his attention to them. Many of the leaders were bribed and others were forced to submit to him by the influence of the prince. It is recorded that it was by sheer force that he overcame the resistance at Alengad.

1. Malabar Syrian Church. Rev. Eappen. pp 61.

But before this determined Catholic could carry out his plans completely, help came to the Syrians from unexpected quarters. This was the coming of the Dutch. These new conquerors advanced rapidly, took Quilon and Cranganore and in 1663 annexed Cochin also from the Portuguese, now humbled and driven back to Goa. Every European Roman Catholic priest was expelled from the country, and thus freedom came at last to the oppressed in ^{the} guise of new rulers.¹ Bishop Joseph entreated to be permitted to shepherd his flock, but was forced to flee. So in a hurry he consecrated a Syrian priest named Alexander to look after his scanty followers, and fled.

Thus the Syrain Church was liberated from the forced thralldom to the Pope. Not a Carmelite Missionary remained in Malabar, but their influence did not wholly disappear. Though several of the churches that were Catholic by compulsion hitherto, returned to their old Syro-Chaldaean rite, a few found it convenient to remain Roman Catholic. These who retained the Catholic faith came to be known as the 'Older Sect' and the others who returned to their original faith, as the 'Newer Sect'.² These names are still in common use among the Syrians, and their name 'older sect' is sometimes put forward by the Catholics to prove that all were Catholics originally!

1. Historical Notices of Cochin pp 16, 19 and 20.

2. Ibid pp. 20-21.

Their association with the foreigners did not fail to leave its mark on the Syrians as a whole, too. Besides a part of them becoming Roman Catholics for ever after, great changes had taken place in the character and the conditions the people. A century of Portuguese rule and oppression killed much of their love of liberty, social pride, and nobility. They lost almost all their ancient hereditary titles and privileges. Their books all burnt, their churches plundered, without adequate means to foster a high standard of education in their Seminary, their priests especially, and community in general, lacked knowledge and culture. So they easily began to imitate some of the customs and practices of the Hindus and the Catholics.

Economically also they lost much. They who were for ages the leading traders of Malabar, were now anything but that. Leaving the cities, many of them retired into the country and took to farming. They went up the hills and cultivated the barren hill-tops, becoming typical farmers, subsisting on the scanty produce of their lands.

But at the cost of their hereditary privileges and economic superiority, they had gained a great experience, from which they can yet learn precious lessons if they care to.

Chapter 7.

The Dawn of a New Day.

Through the dark night of doubt and sorrow, strife and struggle under the Portuguese, the Syrian Church moved on, and by the close of the seventeenth century, was at the dawn of a brighter day. Days of oppression and persecution were soon forgotten, and the peace-loving people again turned to ^{the} business of living and enjoying life.

Then it was that Jacobites began to take interest in them. It is reasonable to suppose that it was from 1663 onwards that the Church came under the supervision of the Jacobite Patriarch of Antioch. It was in this year that a Jacobite Bishop, Mar Geevarghese, arrived in Malabar as the Metropolitan. It is contended by some writers¹ that before this, in 696, a Jacobite Bishop came from Alexandria, and from that time to the arrival of the Portuguese the church was Jacobite. But the inadequacy of the evidences available at present, does not permit us to accept that view.

Mar Geevarghese, any how, was the first Jacobite Metropolitan of Malabar, of whom we know definitely. He was followed by a long line of successors.

Even after the advent of the Jacobites, some churches continued Nestorian. It is recorded, for instance, that from 1714 to 1730, twenty-two churches in the south were under Mar Thomas, a Jacobite, and the churches in the north under a Nestorian Bishop Mar Gabriel, and that there were constant disputes between them. Gabriel, however, seems to have been the last of the Nestorians to rule in Malabar.

1. Indian Church of St. Thomas. pp153.

In 1751, three bishops from Antioch arrived on a Dutch vessel, and it seems, the Captain of the vessel sued the Syrians for their passage money. After this, for a time no one came from Antioch. During this period the Syrians began to consecrate their own native bishops. Their first popular native Metropolitan was Mar Dionysius, who was consecrated by Mar Gregarius and Mar Evanius, two of the three bishops from Antioch, above mentioned. The third bishop who came in 1751 was Mar Vasaleuz. This man, without consulting any one, consecrated one of his own favourite Syrian deacons, now named Mar Kureelos, and leaving him all his earthly belongings, died in 1764. Mar Kureelos aspired to the Metropolitanship but Mar Dionysius appealed to the Travencore Government and to the Dutch East India Company, and secured a favourable decision. At this Mar Kureelos fled to a place called Anjōōr, and there, with the help of some Syrian neighbours, bought some land from the king and built a church to rule over. Thus, in 1774 started the Bishopric of Anjōōr, which has ever since existed as an independent church..

In 1794 Mar Evanius died, and then, Mar Dionysius consecrated his own nephew, Thomas deacon, as Mar Thomas, to help him and succeed him later. Together they managed the church very efficiently.

When things were thus going on well with the Syrians, the Madras Government instituted an inquiry into their conditions, and deputed in 1806, their chief chaplain Dr. Kerr to the task. His report roused so much interest that soon Western visitors to the Syrians were plenty. In the same year, Dr. Buchanan, who was chaplain in Bengal, arrived in Malabar. From his reports some idea of the state of the church and the community at the time is available. Dr. Buchanan visited several of the churches, bishops, presbyters and civic leaders among them, and he it was who induced the Syrian clergy to translate the Bible into the vernacular.

About the churches he wrote, "the first view of the Christian Churches in this sequestered region of Hindostan connected with the idea of their tranquil duration for so many ages, cannot fail to excite pleasing emotions in the mind of the beholder. The form of the oldest buildings is not unlike those of some of the old Parish Churches in England; the style of building in both being of Saracenic origin. They have sloping roofs, pointed arch windows, and buttresses supporting the walls. The beams of the roof being exposed to view are ornamented; and the ceiling of the choir and altar is circular and fretted. In the Cathedral Churches, the shrines of the deceased bishops are placed on each side of the altar. Most of the Churches are built

of a reddish stone squared and polished at the quarry; and are of durable construction, the front wall of the largest edifices being six feet thick. The bells of the Churches are cast in the founderies of the country: some of them are of large dimensions, and have inscriptions in Syriac and Malayalam".¹

After attending service one Sunday, he wrote about their Liturgy thus "Their Liturgy is that which was formerly used in the Churches of the Patriarch of Antioch. During the prayers, there were intervals of silence: the priest praying in a low voice, and every man praying for himself. These silent intervals add much to the solemnity and appearance of devotion: They use incense in the Churches; it grows in the woods around them; and contributes much, they say, to health and to the warmth and comfort of the Church during cold and rainy season. At the conclusion of the service, a ceremony takes place which pleased me much. The priest, (or bishop, if he be present) comes forward and all the people pass by him as they go out, receiving his benediction individually. If any man has been guilty of immorality, he does not receive the blessing; and this, in their primitive and Patriarchal state, is accounted a severe punishment. Instruction by preaching is little in use among them now... They have some ceremonies nearly allied to those of the Greek Church.

1. Christian Researches. Buchanan. pp. 163. Boston 1812.

"The doctrines of the Syrian Christians are few in number, but pure, and agree in essential points with those of the Church of England....The following are the chief doctrines of this ancient Church:

1.They hold the doctrine of a Vicarious Atonement for the sins of men, by the blood and merits of Christ, and of the justification of the Soul before God 'by faith alone' in that atonement.

2.They maintain the Regeneration, or new birth of the Soul to righteousness, by the influence of the Spirit of God, which change is called in their books, from the Greek, the Meta-Noia, or Change of Mind.

3.In regard to the Trinity the creed of the Syrian Christians accords with that of St.Athanasius, but without the damnatory clause.In a written and official communication to the English Resident of Travencore, the Metropolitan states it to be as follows:

'We believe in the Father, Son, and the Holy Ghost, three persons in one God, neither confounding the persons, nor dividing the substance, one in ~~three~~ three, and three in one. The Father generator, the Son generated, and the Holy Ghost proceeding. None is before or after the other; in majesty, honor, might, and power, co-equal; Unity in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity.....In the appointed time, through the disposition of the Father and the Holy Ghost, the Son appeared on earth for the salvation of mankind; He was born of the Virgin Mary, through the means of the Holy Ghost, and was

incarnate God and man'.¹

Dr. Buchanan described the appearance of their bishop too.² "He was dressed in a vestment of dark red silk; a large golden cross hung from his neck, and his venerable beard reached below his girdle. Such, thought I, was the appearance of Chrysostom in the fourth century. On public occasions he wears the Episcopal mitre, and a muslin robe is thrown over his under garment; and in his hand he bears the crosier, or pastoral staff".

It was from reading Dr. Buchanan's account that the Church Missionary Society of England began to take some interest in the Syrians. Also, Colonel Munro, at that time British Resident in Travencore, wrote a letter to this Missionary Society (C.M.S.) requesting them to send somebody to work among these christians. Thus from the year 1816 onwards C.M.S. Missionaries took active interest in the affairs of the Syrian Christians, who heartily co-operated with them in this task.³

Meantime the Church again came to the attention of the Government. Mar Dionysius and his nephew Mar Thomas both died without consecrating any one. The rightful heir put himself forward as Mar Thomas, but there was a large party opposed to him. So they both appealed to the government and Colonel Munro made an inquiry into their conditions.

1. Christian Researches, pp. 174.

2. Ibid. pp. 175-176.

3. Proceedings of the South India Missionary Conference. Octy. 1858. pp. 66.

Discovering the sad need of education among the clergy, this kind-hearted Resident persuaded the native government to give them some land and money to build a Seminary. Soon a Seminary was built at Kottayam, and a class started with some deacons.

The government also donated the sum of Rs 8000 for the purpose of printing and publishing among them the Bible and other religious books in Malayalam.¹ So the education of the people had begun in every way when the C.M.S. Missionaries arrived, in 1816.

For a time the C.M.S. missionaries seem to have had a fear of being misunderstood. The Metropolitan had granted them the privilege of preaching in the churches. Still Bishop Middleton, who visited Malabar and studied the Syrians minutely, advised Rev. Norton, the first C.M.S. missionary, to be very careful in using that privilege.²

The Bishop also wrote to a friend in England that considering the lack of education among them he would rather be surprised at their culture and understanding, than blame them for their ignorance.

The relationship with the missionaries grew strong and warm very soon. More and more young and enthusiastic men who were also scholars, arrived from England. The old Metropolitan died and another Dionysius

1. Land of the Perumals. pp. 251

2. Lives of Missionaries, India, 3rd series, pp. 60, 62, 65, 66.

assumed charge over the diocese. This bishop co-operated with the missionaries and worked enthusiastically to uplift his community. A C.M.S. missionary, Rev. Bailey, was appointed dean of the Seminary and official advisor to the Metropolitan. Later on came Rev. Fenn and Rev. Baker to share the burden with Rev. Bailey. They started more schools ~~and~~ and thus made it possible for all the children to attend them. In these schools the missionaries taught English, Latin, and Greek and other subjects such as arithmetic and history. Native pundits taught Sanskrit and Malayalam; and the priests taught Syriac. A rule was made by the Metropolitan that only distinguished graduates from the Seminary would be ordained. A grant-aid from the Seminary to married priests encouraged them again to start that practice which had almost gone out of existence because of their association with the Catholics. The missionaries went about preaching from church to church, thus educating the common people too. Soon the general conditions of living among the Syrians improved rapidly. Colonel Munro gave several high government appointments to able and deserving Syrians, who discharged their duties faithfully and efficiently.¹.

But again a cloud passed over the Syrian church. Their friend and benefactor, Colonel Munro was transferred

1. Past History of the Malayalam Mission by Rev. H. Baker Senior, in Madras C.M. Record, Dec 1859, pp. 317-319.

from Travencore, and the old Mar Dionysius also died. The next Metropolitan did not like the suggestions of the Resident, or the missionaries. Soon the experienced and well-known missionaries went back on furlough. Others took their places. Thus new young missionaries were facing a new and unfriendly Metropolitan. Interest in each other waned rapidly, and soon the Syrians viewed the well-intentioned missionaries with suspicion.¹

In 1825 there arrived from Antioch a bishop called Mar Athanasius, claiming the Metropolitanship of Malabar. This of course caused a dispute between the foreigner and the native bishops. Athanasius tried to invalidate the consecrations of the native bishops; and they in turn tried to drive him back with government aid. Bishop Heber of Calcutta tried to reconcile these fighting bishops and advised the missionaries to keep out of it. The government at last interfered and the foreign bishop Athanasius had to sail back.

Bishop Daniel Wilson of Calcutta visited Travencore in 1835, and conferred with the Metropolitan and priests about improving the Syrian Church. At Kottayam and other places the Bishop delivered lectures to the people and suggested some changes in their churches and worship. Later, at a meeting of the Syrian clergy and the missionaries,

1. Proceedings of the South India Missionary Conference, Ooty 1858. pp67

the Metropolitan and his people, not only rejected the Bishop's suggestions, but decided to keep away from the missionaries whose intentions, they said, were far from being praiseworthy. The Syrian priests were warned not to associate with them, and the deacons and others were prohibited from attending the missionary schools. All the property that was common to the Syrians and the missionaries had to be sold by the government and proceedings shared¹ between them. It was only the Seminary, its compound and some furniture that remained unsold.

The Church Missionary Society, however, was in great favour with the royal family, and the Queen of Travencore gave them some land at Kottayam, where they built a school which has grown into the leading Christian College in South India.

At this separation between the Syrians and the Anglican missionaries, several Syrian families sided with the latter, and formed an Anglican Syrian Church. Thus the original group of christians in Malabar became divided into three different churches, the Roman Catholic Syrians, the Anglican Syrians, and the Jacobite Syrians.

Of these last, one of the best learned and pious was Abraham of Maramun, who was in favour of the suggestions of improvement made by Colonel Munro. With the support of

1. Malabar Syrian Church. Happen. pp 79.

twelve other priests, he made a list of twentyfive evil practices that were then prevalent among the Syrians, and submitted it to the Resident with a request for help to remove them. The orthodox Syrians naturally opposed him, and the priests dropped off one by one from his side; but Abraham started to reform his own church. Then the Metropolitan ex-communicated him and his few followers.. Nothing daunted, this determined reformer went ahead with his work.¹ When other people found the practicability of these reforms, they began to imitate; and soon there were several other churches to follow Abraham of Maraman.

He educated his nephew at the missionary school at Kottayam against the orders of the Metropolitan; the missionaries afterwards helped the young man to study at Madras. After this young Athanasius was sent to Antioch where he was duly consecrated in 1844.

When he returned from Antioch, the Metropolitan was weak and old, ready to pass away. But already letters had gone to Antioch for other bishops. In 1846 and 1848, there arrived two bishops Mar Kureelos and Mar Athanasius Stephens who both tried to dispute the claims of the native bishop; But the governments of Travencore, Madras and even England², were in favour of the native. So all their attempts were in vain. Mar Athanasius became the Metropolitan.

1. 47th Annual Report of the C.M.S, Kottayam. pp 88-89.

2. Treasury of Knowledge for October. 1855. p. 667, quoted by Eappen, Malabar Syrian Church pp. 83.

With his great influence with the missionaries and the government, this Metropolitan was able to effect several reforms in the Syrian Church. He encouraged the deacons and other Syrian young men to attend the English schools. He welcomed the missionaries again to his churches to preach. Sunday schools were established. And once again Syrians began to be appointed in the Government services.

But the two disappointed Bishops from Antioch had managed to sow the seed of discord among them. Soon a party arose against the Metropolitan, who, they said, was too much in favour of the missionaries. They complained to the Patriarch and the latter consecrated another native whom they had sent to Antioch, as Mar Dionysius the Fifth. This Mar Dionysius returned to Malabar in 1865 but found that the government was strongly in favour of the Metropolitan. So he appealed to the Patriarch to come to his help. The Patriarch visited England and then went to Malabar with favourable letters to the governments of Madras and Travencore. The latter government decided that the Church alone shall manage her ecclesiastical affairs, and that her civil quarrels shall be decided by the civil court. The Patriarch then convened a council at the church of Mulanthuruthi, in July 1876, and there appointed Mar Dionysius the Fifth as the Metropolitan of Malabar. After thus creating a discord, the Patriarch left Malabar.

In 1877, Mar Athanasius died. Before the arrival of the Patriarch, he had consecrated a near relative of his to succeed him. His name was Mar Thomas Athanasius and he had a small party of followers. For the next ten years in the civil court of Travencore, the two Metropolitans fought for the possession of the church property. At last it was decided that Mar Dionysius was the rightful Metropolitan and ever since he has ruled over the Syrians who call themselves today as 'the Bava (Patriarch) party'. Mar Thomas Athanasius and his followers do not recognise the supremacy of the Patriarch, and they are called 'Metran (Bishop) party'. Thus the Jacobite Syrians again divided into two. They both have several churches and schools and they do not differ in their worship. The only difference is that they have separate Bishops, one depending on the Patriarch and the free.

Of these two sections of the Jacobites, the Bava party do not co-operate fully with the missionaries, as they still have their suspicions. They often complain that the arrival of these C.M.S. missionaries has done as much harm to their church as the arrival of the Portuguese. It is significant, however, that these orthodox Syrians are the most backward among the generally well-advanced community. So it might be hoped that a liberal education will cure them of that complaint.

Chapter 8.

The Glowing Torch.

We have followed the Syrian Church through all her eventful life until the present day. But the account may seem incomplete without a few words about her present-day conditions. Though material for this attempt is terribly lacking, the writer hopes he would succeed in giving to the reader some idea at least of the state of the Church.

It has been already indicated in the previous chapters, how the original Syrian community divided into the Roman Catholics and the 'Newer Sect'.¹ These Roman Syrians were first under the Portuguese Arch-bishop of Cranganore. But the Syrians could not get along with the Latinites amicably; so in 1877 the Pope had to separate them from the latter. Today the Latinites have their own bishop at Verapoli (a place near Kottayam), and the Syrians have thier native bishops who are directly under the Pope.

The Anglican Syrians seem to be becoming more and more completely 'Anglicised'. The Church of England appoints from time to time Bishops for the Diocese of Travencore and Cochin. No native christian has yet been appointed Bishop, though there are several native Archdeacons.

Besides these two, another party has also separated from the Jacobites. These call themselves Marthomites. It seems this party owes its origin to the work of the C.M.S. missionaries. Why they separated from the Jacobite Church,

1. vide page 74.

2. Dr. Gill. in C.M.S. Intelligencer September. 1906.

if at all they did, is not yet very clear to anybody. They claim that theirs is the original church established by St. Thomas, whose name therefore, they have adopted. However, they also have their own independent Bishop. In their services the Anglican influence is very evident. They do not use Syriac, and do use several songs and prayers that the Anglicans use.

The origin of the terms 'Older sect' and 'Newer sect' has been already explained. There is another division too, among the Syrians, not based on any religious faith. This is the division into 'Northerners' and 'Southerners'. Again, it must be said that this is not based on the part of the country they inhabit, as the names would seem to suggest. If at all anything, this must be called a Race distinction. The 'Southerners' claim that they are the pure descendents of the original Syrians who came with Thomas of Cana,¹ while the 'Northerners' are sons of the Nambudhiri converts. In other words, that the 'Southerners' are the Syrian Christians, and the others, the St. Thomas Christians. The 'Northerners' say that a race mixture has been effected between the original Syrians and the converts by intermarriage, but that this group, the Southerners, who still keep away according to the caste-system of the Hindus, are the descendents of

1. Vide Chapter 3, pp 29.

the illegitimate children of Thomas of Cana through a high caste Hindu woman. This theory gains support from the fact that all the ancient documents available, such as the Copper Plates, the Crosses, and other things are with the 'Northerners'. Also they are the holders of all the high places in the community.

As our main interest is the original Syrian church which is generally admitted to be the present Jacobite church, we may be justified in leaving the branches and turning to it again.

Their creed is very similar to the Nicean creed, except that they do not believe the Holy Ghost proceeds from the Son too. The Apostle's Creed and the creed of Athanasius have not yet found favour with them. Their belief about the Incarnation may be seen from the following which is part of a confession a candidate has to make before ordination. He has to hold "that Jesus Christ, One of the Holy Trinity, according to His own disposition, and through the disposition of the Father and the Holy Ghost, descended from heaven, and, to fulfil the prophecy of the angel Gabriel, was born of the Virgin Mary; that through the power of the Holy Ghost He became flesh, and in Him combined Divinity and humanity"¹. Again that, "it is the Word of God Incarnate, that has given to our Lord Jesus,

1. This is translation from original Syriac.

One Nature, One Will and One Spirit. He is perfect in His Divinity and perfect in his Manhood[†]. Also "that at the time of His death His Divine Nature did not separate from His Human Nature. His Divinity did not suffer the crucifixion and death... On the fortieth day after His Resurrection, in His human body He ascended into Heaven and sits at the Right Hand of His Father. To deal out rewards to the good and punishments to the evil, He will return in the same body"¹

The Sacraments of the Syrians are seven in number. These are Baptism, Confirmation, Confession, Holy Communion, Ordination, Marriage and the Anointing of the Sick. The most important of these are Baptism and the Communion.

They believe that Child-baptism is necessary and valid, and hold that in Baptism there is regeneration of life. It is enough to have one God-father for a male child, and one God-mother for a female. They use a mixture of hot and cold water to sprinkle on the child. In early days the child was immersed three times in the water; now, ~~only~~ the water is ^{only} sprinkled on the head thrice.

The Holy Communion is intended not only as a commemoration of the Passion and death of our Lord Jesus,

1. Translated from the Syriac.

but also as a bloodless sacrifice offered for forgiveness of sins of the dead and the living. It is compulsory that the laity should receive the Communion at least thrice a year. At the Ceremony, the consecrated bread is dipped in the consecrated wine and then it is given to the recipient. The breaking of the consecrated bread before it is dipped in the wine, is symbolic of the Crucifixion, and when dipped in the wine, the bread and wine together represent the Resurrected body. The partakers of this therefore, are Resurrected.

The Confirmation ceremony is conducted along with the Baptism. They use a kind of ointment or oil for this purpose, which, and two other kinds of oil used for Baptism and for the Sick, are from time to time sent from the Patriarch of Antioch.

Confession of sins in private to the priests who are authorised to give forgiveness, is one of the important practices of the Syrians.

Apostolical laying of hands is absolutely essential for ordination; otherwise it is invalid. There are three orders in the Church. 1. The Episcopate. 2. Presbyterate and 3. Diaconate. Each of these is divided into three as 1. a) Patriarch, b) Catholica and c) Metropolitan, 2. a) KōrEpiscopa, b) Sovōro or Archdeacon c) Kashēesno or Elder and 3. a) Archdeacon (literally) b) Deacon and c) Sub-deacon.

Besides these there are other sub-orders in the clergy such as the Korōōyo or Reader and Msmrōno or Chanter. All priests below the order of Episcopa are permitted to marry. Unmarried priests are not given pastorates, but are permitted to remain so if they want. These are called Rampans. Priests who lose their wives are also admitted as Rampans and are eligible for Episcopate.

Marriage is a holy Sacrament and not a mere contract among the Syrians. Nothing but death can sever the relationship between husband and wife.

Anointing of the sick with oil is a very important ceremony. The priests are expected to visit the sick at any cost, pray for them 'confess' them and anoint them with consecrated oil.

by these people. 1. Seven weeks for Easter; 2. Twentyfive days for Christmas; Fifteen days beginning the 1st of August, for Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary; and 4. Thirteen days in June, ending with the 29th, the day of St. Peter and St. Paul. Usually every Wednesday and Friday, except those coming between the Resurrection Day and the Pentecost, are Lent. Strict vegetarianism is enjoined on all these days.

They pray to the Virgin Mary and the Saints for intermediation. Images are not used in the Syrian churches, though a few may be placed on the outside walls for decoration. Pictures also are used only for decoration. The Cross is regarded with great veneration and respect, and is considered inevitable for every sort of service. Churches are built facing East and consecrated in the name of some Saint or other.

Though they do not believe in the atoning efficacy of punishment in Purgatory, they do believe in prayers for the dead. Also, the relatives of the deceased, every year, do some special acts of charity like the feeding of the poor, or donating some money to the church, for the sake of the dead.

The Bible is a very sacred book and no service is complete without reading it. On important occasions, no less than six lessons are read, three from each of the Testaments. The Gospel reading is always accompanied by the burning of incense and lighting of candles. The Apocryphal books are recognised as part of the Bible, but the Revelation is excluded from the Canon. Though all are encouraged to read the Bible, the right of interpretation is reserved for the Church.

Though Syriac is the ecclesiastical language compulsory for all priests, common prayers are in Malayalam.

In their religious processions and festivals, the Syrians are almost similar to the Roman Catholics. They also have joyful processions around a large fire on the night before Christmas; elaborate mourning for Easter and Good Friday; and great merry-making and feasting for the Resurrection.

.....

A word may be said about the general conditions of the Syrians, too. In culture and education they stand second only to the Parsi community, in the whole of India. Several responsible positions, such as the Chief Minister to kings, Director of Education, Chief Medical Officer, in many of the Native States of India are occupied by them. In the Indian Civil Service and such other High British services too they have their representatives. A large percentage of the Graduates who go for higher education to the West every year, are Syrians. One outstanding feature regarding their culture is that women among them are equally well, if not better, educated than men. The first woman Legislative Council Member is a Syrian. The first woman lawyer in South India is a Syrian. The largest number of women going out for Foreign education from India are Syrians. Jacobites, Marthomites, Anglicans and Catholics, have all their own schools and colleges in plenty. Newspapers and periodicals, too, are ~~not~~ numerous among all these. On the whole the community has advanced considerably within the last century of freedom.



Any sane minded person must admit that this phenomenal progress in culture and education is due in no small measure to the happy contact with the West, established mainly through the Missionaries. When the Syrian Church was staggering from the blow she had recieved from the Portuguese, when she was dizzy with aggressive heathen atmosphere around her, it was the English Missionary who came to the rescue and set her on her feet. He helped her to build schools and seminaries to educate her children, and secured them suitable and responsible positions with the Government; he enabled her to print and publish the Bible and other books and distribute them freely among the people; he sided with her against the native Government in times of need; he encouraged and enabled her qualified sons and daughters to go to Western countries for higher education; in short, he helped her to recover, to some extent at least, her lost character and prestige, and advance rapidly with the rest of the world. All honour to the Missionaries!

Yet it is regrettable to note that the orthodox section of this ancient community still views with suspicion the attempts and efforts of the Missionary to promote its welfare. Some of them even go as far as to say that the C.M.S. Missionaries have done as much harm to their Church as the Portuguese in the 16th century.

They complain that with the help of the Governments of the country, the Church Missionary Society has appropriated property belonging to them, has forced their people to leave their ancient fold and join the Anglican Church, and thus weakened their Church, pretending to improve her.

This, it need hardly be said, is a one-sided and grossly inaccurate view. As is usual with every crowd that is moving forward, there are always some behind and some ahead; and, those ahead blame their fellows for lagging behind, and those behind complain that the others are moving too quick. Along with the moving world, the Syrian Church also has to move forward. Without blindly imitating anyone, she can advance and be up-to-date. Effete Creeds and time-worn traditions have to be discarded, and Truth must be faced courageously, if progress is to be made.

On the other hand, the impatient Missionary Society that discontinued all aid to the Syrians who seemed to be not so co-operative as they expected, must recognize the powerlessness of a formula to effect any sudden change in a community, whose ways of thinking and feeling have been formed by influences operating through centuries of oppression, suffering, and suspicion.

A more sympathetic understanding between the Syrians and the Western Missionaries will be a great step towards the accomplishment of that task which the whole Christian world finds it her duty and her privilege to fulfil, the task of Christianising India.

We have seen this Torch, that was probably lit by St. Thomas, burning brightly for a time, until the Portuguese Storm threatened to extinguish it; we have seen how It flared up again for a moment, and then almost succumbed to the Carmelite Cloud; when It was unexpectedly restored by a Dutch Breeze. From that time onwards the Torch has been steadily glowing. Caretakers have arrived from the West again, this time not to put It out by a blast but to feed It with obnoxious oils. The West certainly has suitable 'oils' which will kindle the Torch again into flaming brightness; but experiment alone will indicate the right one.

Tended carefully, this ancient Torch may yet light up the still dark and gloomy corners of India. It has gleamed through her darkest days, stood her storms successfully, and still continues to glow in spite of brighter Lights all around. Though these latter may light up the places as long as they are there, darkness will prevail unless ~~a~~ Native Light continues to burn there. For that purpose what best suited than this glowing Torch which may easily flare up again with some 'oil' ?

And when one considers ^{the} origin and antiquity, and the strange, eventful history of this Spark of Christian Flame, one wonders if It has not a greater mission to fulfil, than to spread the Flame through India?

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A P P E N D I X.

A.

The miracle is this: St. Thomas found several Nambudhiris bathing in a tank. He saw them occasionally throwing up handfuls of water. He asked them whether they could throw up the water in such a way as to make the drops stay up in mid-air. They expressed their inability and promised to follow the religion of the foreigner if he performed such a supernatural feat. St. Thomas then worked the miracle and the Nambudhiris accepted Christianity.

B.

1. In Madras there was a 'Hamilton Bridge'. The people in course of time, corrupted this into 'Ampitan' bridge. Ampitan means 'barber'. Now the English name of the bridge is Barber's Bridge!

So also Udiamperur became Diamper.

Alapūza became Alleppey.

Kollam became Quilon.

Kaduthuruthi became Kartarti.

C.

1. Thomas Cana Plates. (Two Plates both missing since 1544 A.D.)

Date. A.D. 345. Admitted to be correct by all.

Place. Cocurangan Port. According to tradition, Cocurangan, according to a Portuguese Version in a MS volume in the British Museum, dated 1604.

Cocurangan means 'his majesty the Chera Emperor'.

Donee. Thomas Cananeo, a merchant prince.

Purport.

1. Thomas is given the title of Cocurangan Cananeo, which probably means the Chera Emperor's merchant.

2. He is also given the city of Cranganore and a jungle close by, which he converts into a town with a church and 62 houses.
3. He is granted privilege of using 7 kinds of musical instruments, a palanquin or an elephant as vehicle.
4. 'Dignity' is conferred upon him, probably the title of Maha pilla, son in law to the king.
6. He and his followers, posterity, associates and relations, i.e., all Malabar Christians, are granted five kinds of taxes.

Place. The document was executed while the King was in Carnellur (Cranganore).

2. Quilon Church Plates. Fascicle 1.

Date. 880 A.D. The 5th year of Sthanu Ravi.

Donor. Ayan, king of Venad, roughly the southern portion of the present Travencore.

Donee. The Tarisa (Orthodox Christian) Church built at Quilon in Travencore by Sabriso, (Sapor bishop?) who refounded the city of Quilon in 825 A.D.

Purport.

1. Four women of the Ilava caste together with their eight children, and one family of the washerman caste are given to the Church for menial service.
2. These low caste people are exempted from paying certain taxes.
3. The Church is made the custodian of the Steelyard and Weights, which previously belonged to the king.
4. Low castes given to the Church are allowed to go into Quilon Fort and the christian streets in spite of being the polluted castes.
5. Right of trying the cases of these castes given to the Church.
6. All these have been granted at the instance of Sabriso.

Place. Quilon in Travencore.

Quilon Church Plate Fascicle 2.

Date. 880 A.D. later than the previous.

Donor. Ayan, king of Venad.

Donees. 1. The Quilon Church 2. The Quilon Jews 3. The Manigramam, i.e., the authorised leaders of the indigenous christians of Quilon who had been there when Sabriso came.

Purport.

1. Grants to the Church.

1. One family of carpenters, four of Vellalas and two of another caste.
2. Extensive lands.
3. Right of trying people in these lands.
4. Protection of the Church by Venad militia.
5. Fee for weighing with Steelyard and Weights.

2. Remuneration to Jews and the Manigramam leaders.

1. Remission of certain dues as well as collection of certain others.

- 2.Privilege of assessing customs duty on dutiable goods.
- 3.Right of co-operating with Government in fixing prices of goods, and in all other business of the king.(commercial).
- 4.Seventytwo other privileges, mostly social.
- 5.Privilege of keeping in custody the daily collection of customs duty.
- 6.Right of withholding the above money and the weighing fee until any wrongs done to them are redressed.
- 7.Right of trying their own cases.
- 8.Privilege of occupying Quilon as tenants.

3.Iravi Kortan's Plate.

Date.230 A.D.According to tradition, and Astronomy.
1320 A.D. According to Kielhorn.

Donor.Veera Raghava Chakravarti.

Donee.Iravi Kortan of Cranganore, 'Lord of the city', with the grandiose title, "The Chera king's Great Merchant Supreme in the Whole World".

Purport.1.Iravi Kortan is given the office of Manigramam, very probably the headship of Cranganore merchants.

2.Several social privileges.

3.Monopoly of the over-land and sea-borne trade

4.All other merchants and the five artisan classes are made subservient to him.

5.He is allowed brokerage on all sorts of goods and also customs duty on some.

6.His children and grandchildren and their descendants can enjoy these as a hereditary possession.

Place. Cranganore.

The date of this plate has been separately fixed by astrologers and astronomers in South India as 230 A.D.

End of
The Syrian Church in Malabar

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